



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



1. The first part of the document is a title page.

2. The second part of the document is a table of contents.

3. The third part of the document is a list of figures.

PROVINCIAL SKETCHES.

5

PROVINCIAL SKETCHES.



BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE USURER'S DAUGHTER," THE "PURITAN'S
GRAVE," &c. &c. &c.

LONDON:
EDWARD CHURTON, 26, HOLLES STREET.

MDCCCXXXV.

342.

LONDON :
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS,
WHITEFRIARS.

THE RIVAL FARMERS.

LONDON :
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS,
WHITEFRIARS.



THE RIVAL FARMERS.



PROVINCIAL SKETCHES.

THE RIVAL FARMERS.

A COUNTRY town is awake only once a week, and that is on the market day. Pass through it at any other time, and you see indeed the shops open, and the houses open, and the people, some of them, walking about with their eyes open; but the shops and the houses and the people are all asleep. The few that you see walking about look as if they knew not whither they are going, what they are doing, or why they are out of doors. The shops are as cold and as still as pictures. You see all manner of things in the windows, which

seem as if they had been in the same state ever since the flood, for some of the goods are old fashioned enough to have come out of Noah's ark, and you see the shopkeeper standing at his door, not looking for customers, for that would be a vain and hopeless employment, but merely gaping for something to fill his vacant eyes withal; and should a neighbour happen to be sauntering by, he stops for a bit of chat: so these two propping their backs against the wall and thrusting their hands into their breeches pockets, talk for a while about things in general, and when they are tired they part; the loungee crawls down the street seeking for somebody else to gossip with, and the shopkeeper goes yawning into his shop, and endeavours to keep himself awake by killing flies and wasps. When the London coach passes through the town and changes horses, that is an event; it assembles together at the inn gates all the loose, idle, indolent, gaping staring, yawning surplus population of the town,

who come to look at the horses and the coach and the coachman and the passengers; and most admirable is the placid curiosity, with which the by-standers watch the interesting process of taking off one set of horses and putting on another. The very horses seem to wonder what the people can be staring at; and when the coach is gone, so quiet is the place that you can hear the quacking of a sleepy duck, or the squeaking of a pump handle from one end of the town to the other. But on market days every body is alive and awake, the shopkeeper is behind his counter as busy as a bee, and as courteous as a dancing master, and his shop is full not of impatient customers like a shop in London on Saturday night, but of patient customers like a shop in the country on Saturday morning; for the good housewives who go shopping only once in the week, make as serious a business of it as of going to church. Neighbours meet on the market day, who never meet at any other time, and

they have too many things to think about to do anything in a hurry. Not only are the shops full but the houses are full, the inns are full, the streets are full, every thing is full but the carts and gigs, and the empty carts and gigs stand lumbering about and blocking up half the thoroughfare. Nothing can equal a rural population in a country town on a market day for filling up the streets; the same number of persons as occupy the pavement in Cheapside, and pass by one another moving at the average rate of four miles an hour, would, were they country people, and in a country town, take up three or four times the space, and be continually jostling against one another for want of room. People who are accustomed to broad fields and wide roads, and who ordinarily walk without the ballast of a companion, acquire a sort of serpentine mode of progressing and feel cramped and confined by the limitation of streets, so they generally walk in the middle that they may have opportunity

of admiring the wonders on either side, and also perhaps that they may avoid knocking their heads against the walls or poking their elbows through the windows; moreover they are so exquisitely erratic and digressive that you can never calculate upon their movements for a single yard of space or for one minute of time; they remind one of Sallust's description of the gait of Catiline—" *citus modo, modo tardus incessus* ; and in their attempts to get out of the way of one person they stumble into the way of two, even as a tinker makes two holes in a kettle when he mends one. But the people who fill the town on a market day are not all of them clumsy and ungainly cubs with felt hats, fustian frocks, plush waistcoats, brown leather breeches, sky blue stockings and great greasy shoes as big as wheel-barrows; there are also substantial farmers—not merely such home-spun specimens as were wont some years ago to shine in Mr. Morton's comedies with grey hair, red faces and sentimental heart-

thumpings, but regular downright roystering blades, who drive tilburies, drink claret, and read the magazines, and who show samples of corn in the market with as good a grace as Baron Rothschild negotiates a loan upon 'change. Some three or four such agricultural bucks as these are generally the cocks of the market, and the oracles of the market table; they come driving into the town as furiously as so many sons of Nimshi, and with their hats cocked on one side most knowingly, their smart green frocks, fancy waistcoats, peach blossom corduroy breeches and jockey boots, they swagger about the streets greatly to the perfect admiration of themselves.

Two gentlemen of this caste used to attend the market at Loppington, the name of the one was Jedediah Stott, and the name of the other Simon Growse. They dwelt at a considerable distance from each other, and seldom met save on market days; each was a great man in his own neighbourhood, looking down on the

smaller and humbler farmers around him, and scarcely looking up even to the Squire of the parish himself. When they met, they were excellent friends externally; they were hearty in their mutual shaking of hands, and loud in their how do you do's—they walked together arm in arm, talking magnificently about the state of the crops, and the last number of the Quarterly Review. But with all this apparent cordiality, and these outward symptoms of sympathy, there was a little latent jealousy of the other lurking in the bosom of each of them, and they felt themselves rather rival candidates for, than joint possessors of, the agricultural throne at Loppington. Nor indeed was their ambition confined to this eminence—they aspired, as will be seen in the sequel, to greater glory still. One might have thought indeed that there was room enough for the amplest expansion of the grandeur and ambition of these two gentlemen, without any clashing of interests or unpleasant interference of the one with the

other; but it was not so, for Jedediah could bear no equal, nor could Simon tolerate a superior. There was a diversity of style, character, and talent in these two agricultural bloods;—Jedediah Stott was a man of spirit, and in all the roystering, roaring, spanking, tearing, splashing, dashing accomplishments of the country gentleman, would not suffer himself to be outdone by any lord, duke or squire in the whole county, or the next either, if he knew it. He gloried in riding and driving at the most furious rate the most vicious horses that he could obtain; twelve miles an hour was his usual rate of travelling, and it was admirable to see the coolness and steadiness with which he would manage beasts untameable almost by any hand but his. In field sports he was highly distinguished; he never threw away a shot, and never refused a leap; it seemed as though his eye was insured for an aim, and his neck that it should never be broken. It was his pride to keep great fierce bulls that all the parish was

afraid of, and dogs that were as savage as tigers; and very frequently he had to pay dearly for the ungovernable tempers of these unruly animals. It was also his ambition to outshine all his neighbours in the beauty and forwardness of his garden productions; his peaches, his nectarines, his melons, his grapes, and his gooseberries were always superior to all others; and to crown the whole, the land which he farmed was, with a very small exception, his own property, so that he almost felt himself to be a bit of a country squire withal. On the other hand, Simon Growse was a tenant only, but he was quite as opulent a man as Jedediah Stott, and lived in quite as good style as he, and perhaps in some respects better; for Simon was a bit of a dandy, he understood the mysteries of silver forks, and was so particularly genteel, that whenever he visited London, he made it a point to take up his abode at the very west end of the town, so that his hotel was almost at Knightsbridge while his business was in the

*

neighbourhood of Tower Hill. Simon employed two tailors, one in London and the other in the country, and was very particular in the cut of his coat—more so perhaps than Jedediah Stott. It was quite enough for Jedediah if he had the best cloth and the newest fashion ; but Simon had a more susceptible eye ; he could distinguish in a moment between a town and a country cut. Simon was also a man of letters, and for the matter of that, so was Jedediah ; but Jedediah was content with one or two of the most eminent periodicals, whereas Simon Growse was tolerably knowing in modern literature in general, though he never read novels except Walter Scott's ; his reading was for the most books of travels and works of science. In agriculture, Simon was very scientific by means of books, and if in our English Universities there were professorships of agriculture, Simon Growse would have been the very man for a professor and lecturer. It is true that he was not always successful in his scientific experiments, but he

would have made a very good professor for all that,—indeed he would have shone with unmixed lustre as a professor or lecturer, because then he would have had no facts to put him out or puzzle him. As it was, the books which he read or the inferences which he drew from them, sometimes placed him in awkward predicaments, for either the inveterate and unscientific obstinacy of the soil which he cultivated, or the proverbial and notorious capriciousness of the weather, or something else, or a combination of circumstances over which Simon's sagacity had no controul, and of which his prescience had no apprehension, would occasionally put him out and contradict his theories point blank. And the worst of the matter was, that though he never saw any of his neighbours laughing at him, yet he knew very well that they did laugh at him.

It might have been supposed, from the diversity of the habits and tastes of these two genteel agriculturists, that there would

have been little or no rivalry between them ; that Simon did not envy the savage bulls and fierce dogs of Jedediah, and that Jedediah was not ambitious of a more western locality than Knightsbridge for his sojourns in town. All this is very true : still there was a point of rivalry between them, and that was an exceedingly sore and delicate one,—it was neither more, nor less, than gentility.

Simon Growse prided himself on his literature, on his Knightsbridge hotel, and his London tailor ; and though he was but a tenant, yet his letters were always addressed “Simon Growse, Esq.,” and “Simon Growse, Esq.” was also painted upon his agricultural carts. Jedediah Stott, though a farmer, farmed his own land ; still however he came into the category of tenants, because his paternal acres, not being sufficiently extensive for his agricultural ambition, he rented a few more which were conveniently situated. He also was addressed as “Jedediah Stott, Esq.,” and “Jedediah Stott, Esq.” was painted

upon his carts. Both these gentlemen had their intimacies among the squirehoods of their respective neighbourhoods, yet both of them felt uneasy at the thought, and consciousness, that they were not admitted *ad eundem* in the society of the great. There was, however, one great testimony of gentility, at which both had been for some time aiming, and if one could succeed without the other, it would serve to draw a line of distinction between them, not soon to be obliterated.

In the town of Loppington was a subscription assembly, which was frequented by all, and only, the nobility and gentry of Loppington and its vicinity. There were no nobility in the town of Loppington, but lots of gentility; there was however a nobleman, who had a seat within ten miles of the town, which gave occasion to, and justification of, the phrase of the nobility and gentry of Loppington and its vicinity; so that when any conjurors, or quack doctors, visited the town to astonish the natives by

turning pocket handkerchiefs into night caps, or by cutting corns so effectually as to prevent them from growing again till the operator has left the town, the handbills announcing these miracles were always addressed, under the patronage of the worshipful the Mayor, to the nobility and gentry of the town of Loppington and its vicinity. The subscription assembly, therefore, which was attended by all the nobility and gentry of Loppington and its vicinity, was a very august assembly, and great pains were taken to keep it very select; its exclusiveness however was not directed against stable boys and blacksmiths, but against the encroaching pertness of equivocal gentility, consequently all persons of equivocal gentility were particularly anxious to obtain admission into it. Indeed with such an exemplary diligence and scrupulosity did the committee perform the important duty which devolved upon them, to watch over the selectness of the subscribers to the assembly, that they absolutely refused to admit the banker

of Loppington, because, in addition to his bank, he kept a general shop. In London the bankers do not add the dealing in soap, figs, candles, huckaback, tea, coffee, tin pots, brickdust, and gridirons to their banking business ; but in small country towns, where the division of labour is not carried to the utmost perfection of which it is capable, and where the money business is not so abundant as it is in London and other large towns, it does sometimes happen that the bankers, by way of filling up their time, amuse themselves with dealing in grocery, drapery, and tin-pottery. This was the case at Loppington, in consequence of which the banker, though a very respectable man, and quite a gentleman, as the saying is, was rendered ineligible as a subscriber to the assembly. The committee were very sorry for it indeed, very—but what could be done ! The banker was a most highly estimable man, and a very convenient one withal, sometimes, even to subscribers to the assembly—but he was a shop-

keeper; and that a man who kept a shop should be admitted to the Loppington assemblies, so remarkably select and genteel as they were, would be an abomination, and would sink the town of Loppington from the elevation and rank in which it stood, as being one of the genteelest little towns in the kingdom, down to the level of a common, coarse, low, vulgar, manufacturing town; nay, even in manufacturing towns, though manufacturers be admitted to their assemblies, yet shopkeepers are most religiously excluded, for nature itself revolts at the thought of one who keeps an absolute shop, with an actual, broad, staring glass window stuck full of all manner of goods, daring to presume to come for to go for to think of dancing with one who does not keep a shop.

The Loppington banker then was excluded, and with most exemplary patience did he submit to his fate, but not without deep endurance. He could not complain that he had been unjustly dealt with or severely treated; he knew before-

hand the penalty of shopkeeping as well as Adam and Eve knew the penalty of eating the forbidden fruit; he was conscious of the fact; he was a self-convicted shopkeeper, and he knew that the first commandment in Loppington was, "Thou shalt not keep a shop." From that moment the shop became "a sorry sight," he could not smell soap and candles without a sigh, he liked not the looks of linendrapery, nor could he gaze on gingham without a groan; even sugar itself was no longer sweet, and he mourned over mops and molasses as the birdlime that clogged the wings of his ambition. His nights also were disturbed by frightful dreams; sometimes he would dream that he had been admitted as a subscriber to the assembly, and that he was dressed for the ball, and that he was going with a palpitating heart in a carriage to the rooms, and suddenly the carriage has stopped at the door and he has alighted in eager haste, when lo and behold, instead of finding his feet on *terra firma*, he has leaped into

a treacle tub up to the neck, his eyes have been terrified by the sight of birch brooms crossed at the door of the assembly room to prevent his entrance, and he has smelt such a smell of tallow that he has awoke in the fright, glad to find that it was but a dream. This could not be borne long, and therefore, after much deliberation and with no small sacrifice of profit, he resolved heroically on surrendering the shop and foregoing all the gains of gingham and groceries, and forthwith became a most unexceptionable gentleman and a subscriber to the Loppington assembly.

Soon after this event, which caused a great deal of talk at the time, the ambition of Jedediah Stott and Simon Growse began to ferment, and rise to the height of aspiring to the honour of the Loppington Almacks. From the example of the shop-hampered banker they were both well aware that it was necessary for them to get rid of every removable impediment as speedily as possible. Friendly and sociable as they

seemed to be in the eye of the world, they did not think it expedient to inform each other of their intention, and when it became mutually known by the ordinary operation of gossip, they both treated the affair with the most perfect indifference, as a thing of no moment whatever. They both however began to change their style of appearance in the town of Loppington. They left off their market visits, and instead of offering their samples of grain with their own hands, and in their own proper persons, they sent their respective farming bailiff in their stead. They were quite sure never to be in town on a market-day, but were quite as sure always to make their appearance at the quarter sessions, and to get as much as possible into talk with the magistrates, both lay and clerical. Simon Growse sunk the tilbury and sported an open carriage on four wheels, drawn by two horses, which two horses were driven by Simon's footman, new decorated by a more elaborate and striking livery. And it was well for the horses that he sat behind

them, for had he been before them, they would have been frightened at him, he looked so very fine with blue and yellow and gold lace. Simon now became a more frequent visiter than ever at the public library, and passed of course for a gentleman of letters. He also gave up his peach-blossom corduroys and jockey boots, which had too much of an agricultural aspect. He left off the use of doe-skin gloves and confined himself to kid. He spent more of his time in the town of Loppington than was quite consistent with his agricultural pursuits, for as his landlord did not reside in the county, he hoped to pass himself off as a kind of right down country squire. For this purpose also he took great pains to disguise his farm-house into something like a villa. He put a new front to the house, with French windows and green verandahs; he made a sort of a kind of a lawn in front with a bit of a carriage drive, and he built a cottage for his washerwoman in imitation of a porter's lodge; he put himself also to a most enormous

expense to plant out the agricultural buildings, and to disguise the cow-houses, and to conceal the pig-sties; but it would not do—his Turin poplars might grow as high as the moon, and his firs, and hollies, and larches might be as dense as the Black Forest in Germany, but all this would not prevent his pigs from squeaking, or their sties from sending forth their accustomed odour; moreover, his sheep and oxen were determined to be heard, though their master would not let them be seen;—then again his men in the barn seemed bent upon making more noise than ever in thrashing, in the exact proportion that he wished them to be quiet and to “do their spiriting gently.”

Jedediah Stott also made active preparation for undergoing the grand ordeal of gentility;—fearing that the term tenant would be almost as hostile to his views as the word shopkeeper, he gave up the few acres that he had hired, and even diminished his own holding by letting part of his estate, in order that he might have

the praise and glory of being himself a landlord. He also, for the first time in his life, employed a London tailor; but herein Simon Growse yet triumphed over him, for Jedediah's tailor resided no farther west than Covent Garden, and Simon's dwelt in Bond Street. But Jedediah, as if resolved, at all events, to out-do Simon, entered a horse to run at Doncaster races. It is said that Mr. Growse on hearing this turned as pale as ashes, and looked as if he was going to faint. Jedediah also gave dinners to the gentry of the neighbourhood, or at least to as many as would accept them: Simon Growse did the same; and having heard something of a sneer of Theodore Hook upon the cotton stockings worn by footmen in Russell Square, caused his rustic domestics to wear silk stockings; but it did not answer, for their legs were not exactly of the right shape and colour to set off silk stockings to advantage. While his guests were staring at the fellows' legs to see whether they had on any stockings at all, Simon thought that they were absorbed

in admiration of his gentility, in having put his domestics into such splendid attire. Amongst other modes of preparation, for becoming subscribers to the assembly, Jedediah Stott and Simon Growse contributed with much liberality to various charitable institutions in the town, and so they began to be much talked of in the place, and were highly esteemed as most charitable men. After all preliminary preparation had been gone through, according to the best of their respective ability, their names were severally proposed by their friends as gentlemen desirous of becoming subscribers to the Loppington assembly, provided that the committee should think them eligible. This occasioned a great deal of talk at Loppington amongst the parties concerned, and quite as much among the parties unconcerned, if it can, with propriety, be said that any parties were unconcerned; for the respectability of the Loppington assembly was a matter of interest to every inhabitant who was anxious to maintain the honour of his town.

When the committee were met to decide on the fate of Jedediah Stott and Simon Growse, the whole of the town of Loppington was in most awful and silent suspense, and the committee looked as wise and as grave as the college of cardinals met together to choose a new Pope. It is impossible for us to give any report of what passed in the committee room; this, however, is not owing to any deficiency of information, but to a totally opposite cause, for we have heard so many and such various accounts that we cannot believe them all, and one of them has quite as good a claim to belief as another. We have not only heard all that the committee said, but all that they thought, and all that they did not think, and all that they would have said if they had thought of it, and all that they might have said, if they had been as wise as those who thought for them. This only is known for a certainty, that Jedediah Stott was elected, and that Simon Growse was rejected. The friends of Simon Growse did all in their power, by stating what

a very polite man Simon was—how very much like a gentleman he looked, especially when he had on the clothes made for him by his London tailor—what a very scientific and learned man he was—how he read the *Quarterly Review* and all the best sort of new books—and how his house had such handsome French windows—and how it did not look at all like a farm-house—and how Simon himself did not look at all like a farmer—and how he had left off dining with the farmers at the market-table—and how he never appeared in the market-place in person—and did not show samples of wheat, barley, beans, peas, or oats, with his own hand—how he was a very opulent man, and probably, though a tenant, quite as rich as his landlord, who lived in London and was known to nobody: but all this would not do; the great fact still stared them in the face, that Simon was, after all, nothing but a farmer, and if they opened the doors of their assembly room to farmers, they would presently be overrun with bumpkins, as the Roman

empire was overrun by the Goths, Huns, and Vandals. It was absolutely necessary that the line must be drawn somewhere.

Every one agreed in pitying Simon Growse, and in thinking that his case was very hard, and it was hoped that he would not take it to heart too much. Some persons went so far as to say it was a pity that Mr. Growse, who was certainly a very respectable man, should be so ill advised as to think of placing himself on a level with gentlemen of the county, for, with the exception of the professional gentlemen of the town, there were none but county gentlemen who were subscribers to the assembly; an apothecary, residing in Loppington, was eligible; but a village apothecary never presumed, by virtue of his professional-gentlemanship, to aspire to the honour of the assembly.

The disappointment was rather too much for Simon's patience, and it completely upset his philosophy. After taking so much pains to be an uncommon farmer, it was mortifying to be

treated and counted as nothing but a common farmer. His anger and contempt were most powerfully raised, and it was necessary even to his very existence that he should have his revenge, but upon whom and in what manner did not immediately occur to him ; whether he should vent his wrath against the whole county—man, woman, and child—or whether he should limit his fury to the town of Loppington only, and withdraw from it altogether the light of his gracious presence, and all specimens of his barley, wheat, oats, beans, peas, clover seed, fresh butter, and pigs ; or whether he should make war upon gentility in the gross, and set his face at once against the whole aristocracy of the kingdom, from majesty itself, down to journey-men apothecaries and lawyers' slabs, and so to revenge himself for the slight which he had received at Loppington, by introducing perfect equality and a complete levelling system ; or whether he should direct his whole concentrated indignation and scorn upon Jedediah Stott : but

then occurred the question—in what manner and by what means must he revenge himself upon this more favoured agriculturist? He could not send Jedediah a challenge,—yes, he could send one, but Jedediah was not likely to be goose enough to accept it; and then, after all, it was not Jedediah's fault that Simon was rejected; but the angry man did not consider that, for when a cat's tail is trod upon she must scratch something, if it be but the leg of the table. Simon Growse was as angry with Jedediah Stott as Haman was with Mordecai, and would, with all his heart and soul, have hung Jedediah on a gallows fifty cubits high, but he knew he could not, so he did not give himself the trouble to erect a gallows of those dimensions, or of any other. These, and various other thoughts of a like nature, troubled Simon Growse exceedingly, so that the squeaking of his pigs, and the lowing of his herds, and the bleating of his sheep, and the cackling of his hens, and the quacking of his ducks, and the cooing of his pigeons, were

sounds most unmusical to his ear, for they put him painfully in mind of the fiddling at Loppington assembly, which he, alas! was destined never to hear.

Simon was never any great hand at original composition, notwithstanding his decided literary propensities, but now his indignation was so great that he felt half inclined to write an elaborate essay on pride, and to have it inserted in the Loppington Gazette, in order to crush and mortify those who rejected his pretensions. His mind was agitated by contending emotions; he ardently desired to revenge himself upon those who had insulted him, but he was also desirous not to seem to care anything about them. He wished to treat them with silent contempt, but he did not know how to manage to make his silent contempt sufficiently felt by them. He wished to get upon some eminence from whence he might look down upon them all with supercilious disdain, but he could not manage that. He resolved, at length, upon becoming still

more and more a gentleman, and instead of cultivating the society of the great, he condescended to smaller game, and sought to make himself popular among little folks. Proud of his little literature, he railed against the upper classes as being so ignorant and illiterate, that he had no pleasure in their society; and just at this time, as there happened to be a fall in the price of corn, his agricultural neighbours began to grow exceedingly liberal in their politics, then Simon, of course, sympathised with them, and he became a leading man among them. He then explained to them that they were all ruined, and recommended them to raise a handsome subscription among themselves, in order that they might have the means of creating an opposition in the county at the next general election. From this moment Simon Growse became a decided liberal, and the leader of the liberal party in his own immediate neighbourhood. He gave up the Quarterly Review completely, out of spite to Jedediah Stott, and left

off reading Blackwood, in order to annoy the committee of the Loppington assembly, and of course they were very greatly annoyed by the circumstance. He grew very intimate with the liberal party in the town of Loppington, which, after the soreness of his disappointment was over, he visited more frequently; and he now pleased, by his condescension, those whom formerly he had offended by his pride, not that his pride had at all abated, it was only variously modified.

Simon now began to be happy again; he had found out that the country was ruined, that was one comfort, and he was fully resolved to oust one of the county members at the next election, and that was another comfort. He now found out what he had always thought, that the haughtiness of the aristocracy had risen to most unbearable height, and that it was high time it should be humbled, and he was determined to humble it according to the best of his ability.

Forgetting, poor man, that he himself was the very prince of agricultural dandies, he was always declaiming against dandyism, pride, and exclusiveness. Oh! you should have seen him magnificently lounging in one corner of his four-wheeled open carriage, drawn by two horses, driven by a great bumpkin in gingerbread livery—he looked as big as a duke—I mean Simon, not the bumpkin, who looked rather ashamed of his finery, and almost frightened at the gold lace on his hat. Well, an election came; Simon was as busy as an anonymous gentleman in a high wind. He was flying about the country, here, there, and everywhere, and if any body had told him that there was a voter in the moon, Simon would have sent a post-chaise for him. The liberal candidate gained the election; and Simon was so happy, that at the election dinner, when he was shouting three times three, he absolutely crowed with extasy; some wag said that Simon had been bit by a mad bantam. Soon after this event the Reform Bill was carried,

and to this day it is a doubtful matter, round about Loppington, to whom the country is most indebted for the Parliamentary Reform, whether to the Duke of Wellington, to Earl Grey, or to Simon Growse, Esq.

COUNTRY NEWSPAPERS.

COUNTRY NEWSPAPERS.

COUNTRY newspapers are curiosities, not for their rarity, for they abound and superabound; but for the peculiarity of their literary character. They have a style altogether their own, perfectly original, for it has never had its prototype, and when the English language shall be defunct as a spoken language, and our literature shall be studied by grammars and lexicons, as now are studied the literary remains of Greece and Rome, there must needs be a peculiar set of grammars and lexicons explanatory of our provincial newspapers,—the Hamiltonian system will be hardly applicable to them, for the niceties of their expressions and the subtle

genius of their composition will bid defiance to so simple a mode of elucidation.

The English language in a country newspaper bears the same relation to the English language in general, as a rustic in his Sunday clothes bears to the general population of any large town or city. There are varieties of style, yet there is a oneness of character in it. The language of the editor differs from the language of his correspondents, and the original and local matter differs also from the extracts made from the London papers. But we shall be best able to speak of so comprehensive and complex a matter as a country newspaper, by taking up the matter analytically and viewing the several parts distinctly. A country newspaper is composed of various elements: firstly, of extracts from the London papers;—secondly, of local intelligence;—thirdly, of the editor's leading article;—fourthly, of literary criticism;—and fifthly, of original correspondence — and very original that is.

In the first place then, let us speak of the extracts from the London papers. People in the country like to know what is going on in London, and the editors of country papers generally give their readers a condensation of intelligence under the title of *multum in parvo*. This is a kind of Hamiltonian system of conveying the greatest possible degree of intelligence in the smallest possible number of words, so that one paragraph is made to do the work of twenty. For instance. "On Monday last his Majesty dined with the Duke of Wellington.—Ducks are selling in Leadenhall Market at four shillings the pair.—The Siamese ambassador wore a yellow coat at Lady B—'s rout. It is Lady C. and not Lady D. who has eloped with Lord F.—An affair of honour took place between two journeymen pastrycooks of the New Cut; the parties met at the back of Bethlehem Hospital and after firing two rounds of blank cartridge, the seconds interfered to prevent farther bloodshed.—The cause of the

quarrel is supposed to have been a dispute about the weight of a twopenny loaf.—There is no truth in the report that the Dowager Duchess of Horsleydown, is about to bestow her hand on General Fitzhigginbotham. — In the box lobby at the Adelphi Theatre last night, Mr. Smith called Mr. Brown a fool, and Mr. Brown called Mr. Smith an ass, further particulars in our next. —Last Wednesday the metropolis was visited by one of the most tremendous thunder storms in the memory of man. The hailstones were as big as cabbages, but the thunder could not be heard on account of the noise of the omnibuses and the bawling of the chimney sweepers. —Mr. Clarke has purchased Mr. Simson's famous horse Blunderer, that ran against a brick wall last Greenwich Fair."

There, now, what an immense deal of important intelligence is communicated to the provincial public in the compass of one short paragraph! But sometimes it happens that events of a more awful, serious, and mysterious nature are to be

communicated to the readers, and then no curtailment or abridgment can be allowed, and instead of *Multum in Parvo* we have *Parvum in Multo*, as ; *Remarkable and mysterious occurrence*.—"On Tuesday last the family of Mr. Walter Wiggins, a most intelligent, upright, honest, and conscientious grocer, tea-dealer, tallow-chandler, cheesemonger and hop-merchant, of No. 76, Snipe-street, Wapping, was thrown into considerable alarm by the following extraordinary and mysterious occurrence. It appears, from all that we can learn, that Mr. Wiggins and his family, consisting of himself, his wife, two sons, three daughters, a shop-boy, and a maid of all-work, had retired to rest at their usual hour, half past ten; but they had not been in bed more than three quarters of an hour, when Mr. Wiggins, who is not the best sleeper in the world, thought that he heard a noise at the front door. Alarmed as he naturally might be at this unusual and mysterious occurrence, Mr. Wiggins woke Mrs.

Wiggins out of her first sleep, in order to consult what was best to be done in this emergency. Mrs. Wiggins, who is a woman of great fortitude and discretion, immediately, with the most praiseworthy presence of mind, and without the slightest hesitation recommended her husband to dress himself with all speed, and to take a poker in one hand and a blunderbuss in the other, and go down stairs to the street-door and ask, 'who's there?' This advice Mr. Wiggins took, without more delay, and strange to say, when he got to the door and proposed the question so recommended by Mrs. Wiggins, there was no answer. Again, in a louder voice, and with a still bolder and more determinate tone, he said, 'who's there, I say? why don't you answer? Speak, or I'll blow your brains out.' Still there was no answer; Mr. Wiggins, therefore, being tired of asking questions to which he could get no reply, returned to his bed, and lay awake nearly an hour longer, listening with the closest attention,

but in vain, for a repetition of the knocking. The strictest inquiry has been made to ascertain if possible who the miscreant was, that knocked at the door and ran away. Miss Wiggins has positively declared that, had she not been asleep at the time, it is very likely she should have gone into hysterics. Scarcely anything else is talked about in Wapping, and it forms a prominent topic of conversation in the coteries of Shadwell, Limehouse and Poplar. Our readers may rest assured that we shall spare neither pains nor expense to obtain all possible further information on this mysterious matter."

Paragraphs of this nature are highly valuable to country readers, who thereby gain a knowledge of metropolitan manners, customs, and interests. But if such be the beauty of the general information, greater still is the importance of the local information, which, being supplied by a variety of correspondents, exhibits a corresponding variety of style; but all of them are eloquent—very eloquent.

It seems to be taken for granted that no language is fit to make its appearance in the columns of a country newspaper, except it be adorned and decorated with the most tawdry ornaments, like a chimney-sweeper on May-day. The editor of a country paper cannot be always present in every town, village, and hamlet, through which his paper circulates ; but he has generally in every place some gratuitous correspondent,—not a penny-a-line man, but an amateur writer, who is more than paid for his trouble by seeing his own composition in print. Now if the editor be an elegant writer, delighting to see the English language attitudinising in his paper, like a Harlequin and Columbine in a plumber's shop-window, the correspondents of the paper will be ten times more eloquent than the editor himself.

A baronet's son comes of age, and the baronet gives an entertainment on the occasion. The tenants and villagers dine and dance in the park ; the baronet's friends dine and dance in

the house ; and here follows an account of the festivity :—

“ On Wednesday last the village of Little Dribbleton was a scene of gaiety and festivity, reminding us of olden times, when baronial splendour and hospitality were at their meridian acme of glory. On that day the eldest son and heir of Sir Matthew Mugg, Bart. came of age, and in order to commemorate so grand imposing an epoch, the worthy baronet with his accustomed liberality resolved on giving a splendid fête. Most felicitously fortunately the fineness of the day was favourably propitious to the hilarity of the festival. As soon as the bright Phœbus showed his unclouded face over the eastern hills, the bells of the village church struck up a merry peal, a splendid silk flag bearing the armorial bearings of the Mugg family was elevated on the church steeple, which waved gracefully to the gentle breezes of Æolus, and all the lads and lasses of the village were seen tripping across the plain in their holiday

attire. At one o'clock a dinner was set out in the park for the tenants and inhabitants of Little Dribbleton, which consisted of the most liberal supply of the good old English fare, roast beef and plum pludding, while rivers of home brewed ale were liberally supplied to wash down these substantial viands; and the condescension of Lady Mugg, who actually ate a piece of the plum pudding, provoked the loudest plaudits from the assembled multitude. When the guests had discussed their dinner they proceeded to their sports in the park, which were ably managed and skilfully arranged under the highly talented superintendence of Mr. Hogsflesh, the landlord of the Crown and Pigstye. The sports consisted of donkey-racing, pig-hunting, jumping in sacks, grinning through a horse collar, running for a chemise, and such like manly sports, which were wont in the olden time to invigorate the frame, and to make Britain the pride and envy of surrounding nations. The racing of asinine quadrupeds

afforded most excellent sport, and the prize, which consisted of half a Cheshire cheese, was carried off in triumph by young Joe Mumps, son of the celebrated cricket player of that name; and, singular it is to relate, but such is the fact, that Peggy Mumps, his sister, was victress in the chemise race, so that two prizes went into one family. Dancing also was provided for such as loved that graceful recreation, and many of the lads and lasses of Little Dribbleton were tripping it on the light fantastic toe till such time as the beautiful queen of night, in her silver car, the chaste Dian, sister to the bright-eyed Phœbus, began to climb the eastern heaven. The entertainment within the hall was on the most splendid and sumptuous scale, consisting of every delicacy that the season affords, and exhibiting a profusion of the most costly viands. The magnificent display of brilliant plate exceeded all that we ever read of in the Arabian Nights' Entertainments, or Gulliver's Travels. All the beauty and fashion of Little

Dribbleton were present, and the *élite* of the vicinity graced the festival with their company. Among the company present we observed the Reverend Oliver Whiteface, Mrs. Whiteface, and the nine Misses Whiteface, John Popkins, Esq., Mrs. and the seven Misses Popkins, *cum multis alios quæ nunc proscribere longam est.*"

This is rather a long communication, but woe betide the editor if he dare to make the slightest alteration in it, or curtailment of it; should he correct the Latin quotation or omit it altogether, there would be such a philological controversy in the paper, that its columns, for the next six months, would look like "the Diversions of Purley." Should the editor, by any accident, omit the name of Popkins, or insert it as Mr. Popkins, the village apothecary, no individual, bearing the name of Popkins, would read his paper for the next twenty years; and, in all probability, such an insult would lead to the establishment of a rival paper on independent principles. The editor of the Blunderton

Chronicle once lost fifteen subscribers and a constant correspondent, for presuming to substitute the word "moon" for "lunar orb," in an epistolary communication. It was in vain the editor protested that the alteration was made merely from want of room, and that he was aware of the great superiority of his correspondent's talents; the correspondent was inexorable, and would never forgive any man such a gross and scandalous crime, as daring to presume to correct his style. Many other pleasant matters of local intelligence grace the columns of a country newspaper, such as gigantic turnips, unseasonable cabbages, kittens with six legs, pigs with one ear, and, peradventure, some elaborate narrative of "certain diabolical miscreants, sacrilegiously breaking into the pantry of the parish clerk, and stealing thereout two cow-heels and a bushel of tripe, together with four pewter spoons and a bran new gridiron, which he had provided for his Sunday dinner."

It is to be particularly remarked, that country

thieves, in country newspapers, are all diabolical miscreants, therefore, all those who would avoid the reproach of diabolical miscreancy, would do well to avoid plundering pantries in the country. For my part I cannot see how a man can hold up his head again, after being called a diabolical miscreant in a country newspaper, it is enough to kill him for life.

Country papers must now sport leading articles, and it is a very hard thing if out of a whole week's newspapers from London, by means of picking a bit here and a bit there, something cannot be cooked up in the shape of a political preachment. Sometimes, especially if "we" happens to be rather eloquent, "we" writes an original article, all of our own composition, and if "we" happens to be in opposition, the ministers tremble on their seats; and our little country thunder, which "roars you as gentle as any sucking dove," makes the bumpkins prick up their ears and look as knowing as the north star. What minister can feel him-

self on a bed of roses, when he takes up a country newspaper and reads. "We give ministers a fair warning, we have borne with their imbecility long enough; our patience is exhausted; and, unless they change their tactics, we shall withdraw from them that support which hitherto we have conscientiously yielded them. We look for prompt and vigorous measures; for the instantaneous reform of all abuses, and for the establishment of the government on those sure and unerring principles of general utility, which can never fail." There is some spirit in such language as this, there is no mincing of the matter, but it is coming boldly to the point at once, and such a terrible "we" as this, is not to be bought at any price. Ministers would do well to look to themselves.

Severe, however, as is the political "we" of a country newspaper, the literary "we" is quite another thing, though, perhaps the same person. More lenient, more gentle, more sweetly encomiastic judges of literary merit, are not to be

found, than the critics in country newspapers. They are not unmindful of the proverb which tells us not to look a gift horse in the mouth, and they would think it very unkind indeed to speak ill of a book which has been given to them gratis. Then they praise so heartily, and with such a right good will; all novels are equal to Walter Scott's, or Miss Austin's, or are the best of the kind, or the best that have been published this season, or are superior to the common run. It is mightily pleasant too to have the name of one's newspaper blazoned in the advertisements, and it pleases one's vanity to have one's critical opinion quoted as an authority.

But the most important and most interesting part of a country newspaper, is the original and epistolary correspondence; the style is superb, and the topics are infinite. To the uninitiated it may appear strange that matters so exquisitely trivial, and so intensely individual, should find place in a public journal, but the pretty compliments with which they are introduced renders

it impossible to refuse them admittance; they speak so pleasantly of "your widely circulated journal;" "your instructive columns;" your valuable columns;" "your influential journal;" "your independent pages;" and the like; that to refuse them admittance would look like ingratitude. Then, again, it would be a cruelty to reject them, seeing that they have been written with so much labour, and they are, perhaps, the only chance that the writer has of a week's immortality; and more important still, if the editor rejects, curtails, or corrects, any letter from any one of his correspondents or fellow townsmen, he loses a subscriber to his paper, and makes an enemy who will last him for life. Junius was a pretty fellow in his day, and he startled the natives when he poured forth his deep-mouthed vituperations, but a correspondent of a country newspaper will beat him at his own weapons, and out-Junius Junius. Now to give a specimen; let us look at the high-spirited and indignant eloquence with which a provincial patriot complains of a public grievance.

“ To the Editor of the Blunderton Chronicle.

“ SIR,

“ As an Englishman and a Briton, I cannot but feel the profoundest indignation and contempt, when our social and domestic peace is invaded by a rude and cruel barbarism. And where, Sir, shall the injured and insulted, in such cases, seek redress but in the independent columns of a widely circulated journal, like the *Blunderton Chronicle*? It has been said that an Englishman's house is his castle, that all the winds of heaven may blow around it, but the king cannot and dare not enter it. The winds of heaven will blow, Sir, where they list, but I have managed, by listing my doors, to keep the wind pretty well out of my house, and as for the king he has never attempted to enter it. But, Sir, there is a nuisance greater than all the winds of heaven, and all the kings on earth, which I cannot keep out of my house, it is the nuisance of a nasty disagreeable noise. It is my melancholy lot to dwell in the south-east corner of the market-place, where, as your intelligent

readers know, stands the parish pump; and the villanous creaking of the pump handle is a perpetual annoyance to me and to all the inmates of my house. Often, before the glorious orb of day has risen from the eastern sky, shedding its beautiful light over hill and dale, some little slip-shod urchin, bringing a tin tea-kettle to fill with water for his mother's breakfast, has made such a shrieking, squeaking noise with the pump handle, as to remind one of that harsh noise mentioned by Milton in *Paradise Lost*, where he speaks of some rusty hinges that wanted oiling. And then again, Sir, when night, with its sable mantle, has invested the sky, we hear the same villanous noise again. In fact, Sir, so great is the nuisance, that I am sometimes tempted to emigrate to the Swan River, or to the back settlements in North America. Now, Sir, I write these few hasty lines to you, Sir, just to ask where and how I may obtain redress from this grievance. The parish pump, Sir, is public property, and should,

therefore, be kept in order by the public servants. Let me then, through the medium of your valuable journal, call the attention of the public functionaries of Blunderton to the rusty condition of the pump handle. For what purpose, Sir, have we a mayor, a recorder, a town-clerk, two town-criers, a rector, a curate, three beadles, a grave-digger, a parish-clerk, four churchwardens, twelve aldermen, thirty-six common councilmen,—all sucking the blood out of our pockets, and living upon the vitals of the nation—if the pump handle is still to remain in this rusty condition? I just throw out these hints in a gentle sort of way, to remind our functionaries of their duty, and unless the grievance be speedily remedied, these gentlemen shall hear from me again in a style which they will not like.

“Yours, &c.

“VALERIUS POPLICOLA.”

For a whole week after the appearance of this

letter, Valerius Poplicola, whose real name is Andrew Snipe, the leather cutter, is the proudest and happiest man in all Blunderton. As for suffering any real inconvenience from the noise of the pump handle, that is a mere farce, there is no sound so musical to his ears, for it reminds him of his eloquence and fame.

But when a quarrel is carried on in the columns of a widely circulated and influential journal, you would think that the English language would break down under the weight of eloquence, with which each party pelts the other. As, for example, there happen to be in the town of Blunderton two gentlemen, somewhat vain of their vocal powers, and, consequently, pretty particularly considerably jealous of each other. The one calls himself A. B., and the other subscribes himself Y. Z. It happens that A. B. has accused Y. Z. of singing out of tune at church, but he has not made a public accusation in the newspaper, nor has he brought the affair before a grand jury at the assizes, he

has merely whispered the fact among a few particular friends, and all these particular friends whisper it to their particular friends, so that all the town is presently in possession of the important fact, that A. B. has no great opinion of Y. Z.'s vocal powers or musical judgment; and as the matter becomes town-talk, nothing remains for Y. Z. but to vindicate his character, as well as he can, and to inflict merited and eloquent castigation on A. B., in the valuable columns of the Blunderton Chronicle, made still more valuable by the stupendous eloquence of Y. Z. Here follows a letter to the editor.

“ SIR,

“ When an individual, however humble or obscure, has a character to support, in the eyes of the world, for integrity, honour, and vocal discernment, and when a dark-souled, moody, malignant calumniator darts his envenomed shaft of diabolical falsehood against the breast of the defenceless, it becomes an impe-

rative duty for the innocent accused, to drag forth the miscreant from his hiding-place, and to expose him in the Blunderton Chronicle to the merited contempt of the universe. For myself, sir, I care not a straw for his opinion; what is it to me that A. B. entertains a humble opinion of my singing? I do not sing to please him. So far as my own feelings are concerned, I am perfectly indifferent to everything that he may say or think; he may go on lying, slandering, calumniating, and vilifying as long as he likes, I heed it not: I can bear it all with the most perfect unanimity, and with the profoundest and most silent contempt: but, sir, let me say, that I feel it to be a duty which I owe to society, to crush these venomous reptiles in the bud, lest growing, unchecked, to an enormous power, they spread their pestilential branches, like the deadly upas tree, poisoning the fountain and polluting the streams of peace and good will among men.

“And now, sir, having thrown down the

gauntlet of scorn and derision, I quit the arena, in conscious rectitude of intention, leaving A. B. at his leisure to ruminate on this merited castigation; and to learn that I have a spirit to resent an insult, and a pen to vindicate my wrongs.

“ Believe me, sir, that I feel exceedingly reluctant thus to encroach on the valuable columns of the Blunderton Chronicle, and to thrust myself before the public, leaving that calm, sequestered privacy which best suits my humble taste and moderate capacity. I have now done, happy to sink again into my humble individual character, saying with the bard of Twickenham:—

Thus let me live unseen, unknown,
Thus unlamented let me die,
Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I lie.

“ Yours, Mr. Editor,

“ Y. Z.”

On the strength of this Y. Z. crows for a

whole week ; and next week it is the turn of A. B. to crow. This Mr. Y. Z. we observe is a bit of a sentimentalist, and he seems almost to write with tears in his eyes ; but his opponent is a wit, as we shall see in his answer, addressed as follows :—

“ To the Editor of the Blunderton Chronicle.

“ SIR,

“ Your correspondent Y. Z., has been facetiously pleased to put himself into a violent passion, and to talk very learnedly about upas trees, and venomous reptiles. Now, sir, as to the accusation of being a tree, I beg to plead not guilty ; and I think, if I were put upon my trial, I should be acquitted in any court in the kingdom. A tree, sir, according to the opinion of the most eminent naturalists, is a vegetable substance that has its roots in the earth, whereas with all due deference to Y. Z.'s superior judgment, I beg leave to state, that I regard myself as an animal substance, possessed of the powers

of locomotiveness ; nor do I think that I am much more like a reptile than like a tree. The word reptile is derived from the Latin word *repto*, " I creep ;" but I beg to inform Y. Z. that my style of locomotion is walking, not creeping. But to the subject : Y. Z. pleads guilty to the charge I bring against him ; for he says, " I do not sing to please him." Well, sir, and what more have I said, of Y. Z., than that he does not sing to please me ? However, I must say, that when people sing only to please themselves, it would be well, perhaps, if they would not sing quite so loud.

" Yours, &c.

" A. B."

Y. Z. must have the patience of Job, if he could let such a reply as this pass unnoticed ; he is, therefore, again reluctantly dragged forth from his much-loved privacy, into renewed publicity in the valuable columns of the Blunderton Chronicle. Thus he writes :—

“ SIR,

“ Your paper of last week contained a most scurrilous and brutal attack on my character, signed A. B. Give me leave, sir, to tell A. B. that I treat his insinuations with the most marked and silent contempt; and that, while I detest his slander, I despise his intellect. I believe, sir, that every body who knows me is pretty well aware that I have nothing of the pedant in my character; but I cannot help saying, that I should be sorry to expose my ignorance to the world as A. B. has done. Can anything be more absurd than to say that I accused him of being a tree? The merest tyro, on looking at my letter, will see that I did not accuse him of being a tree; but that I compared him to a tree. Now, sir, I would only request of A. B. that he would just have the goodness to read Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Thomson's *Seasons*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, Cowper's *Task*, Virgil's *Æneid*, Blackmore's *Creation*, Pye's *Alfred*, and Cottle's too, if he likes, toge-

gether with Homer's Iliad, and any other such like poems; and he will find many comparisons and similes therein: but the persons so compared are not accused of being the things to which they are compared. Comparison is altogether a poetical figure:—but what does A. B. know of poetry? Indeed, Sir, if A. B. really was a tree, I think it would be all the better for the town of Blunderton; for then he would be confined to a spot, and might be avoided; whereas now, with his power of locomotiveness, as he calls it, he goes about from place to place, diffusing the deadly venom of his slander. By the way, sir, if A. B. wished to show his learning, in stating that the word “reptile” was derived from the Latin word *repo*, I wonder he did not go a little farther, and show that the Latin *repo* is derived from the Greek ἔρπω; but I apprehend that Greek is rather too much for him. One word more, sir, and I have done with the fellow for ever. A. B. says that I acknowledge that I do not sing to please him,

and that this is the charge he brings against me. Now I would ask any candid man, if I meant anything more by this sentence, than that I did not care whether my singing pleased him or not; and yet he takes it that I plead guilty to the charge of singing out of tune. But enough,—enough; it is quite too much to have to do with such a shuffling adversary.

“Yours, &c.

“Y. Z.”

The controversy does not end here. A. B. is down upon Y. Z. again, and the letters keep growing longer and longer, till the editor is forced to discontinue them for want of room; then they grow into pamphlets, and make work for what the London papers call the gentlemen of the long robe. How very much obliged are the gentlemen of the long robe to the gentlemen of the long ears! So much for country newspapers.

**THE SNUG LITTLE WATERING
PLACE.**

THE SNUG LITTLE WATERING PLACE.

MARGATE, Ramsgate, Broadstairs, and Brighton, are but so many metropolitan laundries, and the very waves of the sea, which wash their coasts, are saturated with smoke and savour strongly of London, so that he who goes to one of these places does not so much go out of town as out *with* town. But, for a most perfect, most beautiful, and most genteel retirement, give me a snug little watering place, accessible only to the inhabitants of small genteel towns, and far away from all metropolitan din or manufacturing smoke,—in a word, just such an one as Slopesly, on the —shire coast. All I fear is, that this pleasant place will soon become too

popular, that it will lose its selectness, for all who have visited it speak of it with such rapture, that it must soon be as much frequented as it is admired. At present, however, I am happy to say, that there is nothing vulgar about it; for there are no cliffs or rocks, and no romantic country in its rear, inviting to equestrian or pedestrian excursions; there are no trees, but pollard willows, within ten miles of the place; no road runs through it, and only one runs into it, and that one runs or lies—for running and lying is all the same thing for a road—along an exquisite swampy level, abounding in bull-rushes; the sea also, at this part of the coast, is most delightfully shallow; no vessels of greater burden than small fishing boats, can come within five leagues of the town, and that is great comfort, for vulgar people are very much attracted to the sea side by great waves and the sight of big ships. There is, indeed, a tradition in the town that a man of war was once seen, through a telescope from the church

steeple, but there is only one telescope in the town, and only one church steeple, and the telescope is very much out of order, for all the glasses are cracked; and the ascent to the church steeple is dangerous, for all the stone steps are loose. At low water the sea is pretty nearly out of sight, and, sometimes at high water, in rainy weather, the land is out of sight, for the low grounds are nearly covered with water; but no one need, for all that, be at all afraid of the ague, for there are innumerable infallible remedies for that complaint, sold at every shop in the town; so that, if you should find that one infallible remedy will not do, you may try another, and another, and by the time that you have tried them all, the season will be over, and you may go home.

The town of Sloppesley is an ancient and venerable borough, and used to send two members to Parliament. The government of the borough is vested, so say the gazetteers, in a mayor, recorder, six aldermen, and twenty-four common councilmen. To quote the gazetteers

again, I may add, that there is a beautiful church, having on the top of its beautiful spire a beautiful weathercock, which used to be regilt once in seven years, at the expense of the patron of the borough, but, since the passing of the Reform Bill, no such corrupt practices are likely to prevail. The population of the town does not exceed seven hundred. There is a market-place, and there is a town hall, and there is a curious fact relating to the latter, which may be here recorded for the amusement of the curious. The town hall has not been opened for nearly fifty years, and the circumstance of its being thus pertinaciously closed originated as follows.

In the year one thousand, seven hundred and something, at the inauguration of the new mayor, a sumptuous entertainment was given, as usual, to the corporation, and after the feast was over the hall was locked up. According to the charter, or, at least, according to immemorial custom, the out-going mayor should, on this occasion,

give up the key to his successor. But it so happened, at this particular feast, that neither outgoing, nor in-coming, mayor, knew or thought anything about the key of the town hall, and the town serjeant, who locked the door, was equally oblivious with their worships. On the following morning the whole town was in confusion and dismay; a rumour was afloat that the town hall was locked up and the key was lost. The town serjeant could swear that he locked the door; the new mayor could swear that he had never received the key; and the old mayor could swear that the key was not in his possession. A question was then started—whose business was it to provide a new key? The corporation could not conscientiously consent to have the expense defrayed out of the corporation funds; the new mayor said it was no concern of his, and the old mayor said that it was no concern of his; and the town serjeant said that it was no concern of his. The recorder, a gentleman learned in the law, was applied to for his

opinion, but it was impossible for him to give an opinion without perusing most attentively the corporation charter; but the charter was locked up in the town hall, and the blacksmith would not break open the door, without a previous indemnification which no one seemed inclined to give him. So there the matter rested, and there it is likely to rest; and thereby the town hall has become an exceedingly interesting building, for there is something peculiarly attractive in the sight of a dingy old brick and stone edifice, which has not been opened for fifty years. It also serves the inhabitants for something to talk about to strangers, for no visiter of this snug little watering place was ever six hours in Sloppesley without hearing all the particulars of the wonderful town hall which has been locked up for fifty years.

Sloppesley has not been a watering place for any great length of time; it was first discovered by the rector of Blunderton, who for several years kept the discovery to himself. He was a retired sort of man, and very genteel; year after

year he used to vanish with his family about the time of the bathing season, with as much regularity, and as much obscurity, as the swallows perform their wintry migration. Some people thought he was gone to one place, and some persons thought he was gone to another, but nobody ever suspected that he was gone to Sloppesley, for nobody ever supposed that Sloppesley was a genteel watering place. But the fact is, that Sloppesley was a very cheap place; you might have lodgings there for next to nothing, and provisions of all kinds were equally reasonable, as folks say, because it was a place of no great traffic, and whatever was brought into market must needs be consumed by the inhabitants, or taken back to the place from whence it came.

The rector of Blunderton was also passionately fond of selectness, which at Sloppesley he enjoyed to perfection, having no one there to associate with save his own family. After a lapse of some few years, when his family had almost

all married away from him, he found himself rather solitary in his sojourns at Sloppesley, and he persuaded another family from Blunderton, as genteel as his own, to join him in his periodical migration. From that moment Sloppesley began to hold up its head and look great, and it endeavoured to wriggle itself into notice by all possible means. There was a little puff advertisement in the county newspaper, headed "Arrivals at Sloppesley," and whoever, during the bathing season, happened to come into the town by any chance, or on any business whatever, were sure to have their names set down and published among the arrivals at Sloppesley. Commercial gentlemen travelling that way for "money and orders," were honoured by a week's immortality in the Blunderton Chronicle. The inhabitants also of Blunderton and Loppington began to talk very knowingly about the extreme selectness and profound gentility of Sloppesley as a watering place; it was not, indeed, they said, the most pleasant or romantic spot on the coast

of Great Britain, nor was it altogether indeed the best adapted for the purpose of sea bathing, but so much the better, said they, "because if it were a pleasant place all manner of people would be flocking there, and if it were well adapted for bathing, the place would be filled with sick persons and invalids, the sight of whom would be very unpleasant to those who went out for pleasure." In fact there was nothing vulgar at Sloppesley, and though the place was not much more amusing than the deserts of Siberia, it was an honour to have been there; the people at Loppington and Blunderton always thought more highly of those autumnal emigrants who went to Sloppesley in the bathing season, than those who went to any more agreeable and better appointed watering place.

But we have not half described the place yet; we have spoken of the town hall and the church, but we have said nothing of the market-place, and that is a great oversight. In good truth the market-place is almost the whole of the town, for

the town consists of only one street, not very long, nor, except in the middle, very wide, but somewhat in the shape of a ninepin, narrow at either end, and widest in the middle, and this middle is called the market-place ; here butter and eggs, and pigs and chickens, and wooden spoons and crockery, are sold every Saturday, and here stands the marvellous town hall, built in a style which would puzzle Vitruvius to define—it looks like Noah's Ark bottom upwards. Since Sloppesley has risen to the rank of a snug little watering place, it has added to its attractions a thing which, for want of a better name, it facetiously calls a public library. This public library, however, has no existence except during the bathing season ; it is supplied with its books and all its other numerous or innumerable additamenta from the town of Blunderton. The people of Blunderton are all very genteel, especially the shopkeepers, and they were decidedly of opinion that it was absolutely impossible for any resident in Sloppesley to

do the honours of a public library during the bathing season with any degree of propriety; the keeper of a library, therefore, at Blunderton, ventured, by way of speculation, to open a fancy lounging repository at Sloppesley, and in order to render the affair as attractive as possible, the superintendence of it was committed to two young ladies, who were considered rather pretty, and who had not the slightest objection in the world to dressing themselves out in a most outrageous caricature of the existing fashions. These young ladies, knowing that they were placed in this situation in order to attract, endeavoured to make themselves as engaging as they could, in which matter they displayed more zeal than judgment; they burdened their heads with loads of combs and false hair, and painfully long pendent ear-rings, and their fair broad faces were glaringly overspread with rouge. But no words can describe the elaborate gracefulness and elegance of their manners. They felt that it was great part of their business to make them-

selves agreeable, and for this purpose they cultivated a style of demeanour the most outrageously ridiculous that can possibly be imagined; they were a complete burlesque even of affectation itself. Yet stay; before we proceed any farther, it may be necessary to say a few words concerning the nature of this institution called the library. The building is of wood, and is situated at the sea-side extremity of the town, and it has its door and windows all opening towards the sea. The room is not very large, being about twenty feet long and fifteen feet wide, but it is devoted to many purposes: first of all it was a library—*the* library, so called because it contained about as many novels as might fill three wheelbarrows. It is also called a news-room, because it contains one newspaper, which has no sinecure, not, indeed, from the great multitude of readers, but from the pertinacity with which its few readers attach themselves to it, each individual taking on an average about two hours to read it.

After the first season it was found necessary to add cakes and gingerbread, together with soda water and ginger beer, to the establishment. It may be here remarked by the way, that the young lady who presides over the ginger beer and soda water department, has such a peculiarly elegant twist of the neck and turn of the eye, when she opens a bottle of ginger beer, that it is almost worth a journey to Sloppesley to see her. But those who wish to drink the ginger beer and to eat the cakes, would do wisely to go at the beginning of the season, for towards the latter end of it they grow flat and stale. The public library, besides being a news-room and a cake shop, is also a toy shop and a trinket shop, and a perfumer's shop; to perfumery also is added millinery, with feathers, flowers, and fancy goods; in a word, the establishment is stocked with an innumerable and unclassable assortment of good for nothing goods, at sight of which Socrates would have turned up his eyes and nose contemptuously,

saying, "how many things are here which I do not want!"

Why this wooden box is called "The Rooms" I cannot tell, but so it has been called of late years, and that with the most decided gravity, by all the frequenters of Sloppesley, and by many of the inhabitants. Indeed, considering the important station which it holds in the town, and that it supplies the visiters to the watering place with the greater part of their day's occupation, it is hardly to be wondered at that it should bear the most magnificent name that they can find for it.

What an exceedingly interesting novel might one make under the title of "*A Season at Sloppesley*"—the alliteration is pleasant, and from the vacuity of the place, most ample room would be given for an author's powers of invention. How to get rid of a day at Sloppesley is one of the most curious and perplexing problems that ever puzzled a conjuror. Fortunately for us, we have two interesting narratives on record on this very

topic, both of which have appeared in the Blunderton Ladies' Pocket Book. One of them is written by a lady, and is entitled, "A Fine Day at Sloppesley." The other is written by a gentleman, and is called, "A Wet Day at Sloppesley." First then for the first.

"A FINE DAY AT SLOPPESLEY."

"What can be more serene and placid than a fine day at Sloppesley? The sky is without a cloud, the sea is without a wave, and the land is without a hillock. Every thing seems to harmonise! What a beautiful contrast to the agitations and storms of ordinary life! Tempted by the beauty of the morning I ventured to walk down to the beach as early as ten o'clock. The walk on the beach does not exceed a quarter of a mile in length, at least it is not reckoned genteel to walk further, and as I am a great lover of propriety, I would not for the world violate its principles, though I might have done so on the morning in question without detection, for I was the only individual on the beach.

“For two hours and three quarters I walked to and fro, meditating on the beauties of nature and enjoying the fine refreshing breezes which come from the sea. Once or twice in the course of that time, I ventured to pause and look towards the distant horizon in hopes to catch a sight of a sail, for I have been told that, in fine clear weather, ships may sometimes be seen from Sloppesley, and the poets have spoken with rapture of the beauty of vessels sailing on the sea. Several times I actually thought that I saw a sail in the horizon, but I believe it was only what philosophers call *deceptio visus*. I saw, however, several sea birds, whose note is very peculiar, differing widely from that of land birds; if I could compare the song of the sea birds to that of any other of the feathered tribe, I think it must be to that of the peacock. As the tide was down, several shells and sea-weeds were visible, but unfortunately not accessible, for the mud is composed of such yielding materials that it is by no means safe to set one's foot upon it.

I also thought I saw some few small crabs crawling about in the sunshine on the mud—the effect of the sun shining on the vast expanse of mud which is made visible at low water, is most striking and peculiar—those who have always resided in an inland town, and who have never visited the sea coast, can form no idea of the sublime monotony of that placid sight. As the music of the feathered songsters of the sea, differs from that of the feathered songsters of the land, so does the fragrance of marine vegetable productions differ from the fragrance of the vegetable productions of the dry land, and notwithstanding I am decidedly of opinion that Sloppesley is an exceedingly genteel place of resort, I cannot but confess that the smell of new mown hay is rather more pleasant to the olfactory nerves than the odour of sea weeds at low water.

“Having walked on the beach till I was fatigued, I adjourned to the rooms. Here also I found myself alone and companionless as I

had been upon the beach. The door of the rooms was open, and therefore I sat down, looking towards the sea, in order that I might catch the sight of any one who might come down to the beach; but I could see nobody, and I may add, that I could see nothing save a double allowance of sunshine, for the sun's own rays shone directly in my face, and its reflected rays came glancing upwards from the wet sands. Sunlight is a great blessing; but it is possible to have too much of a good thing, and indeed so I found it, for after sitting in that excess of light for an hour and a half, I was nearly blind. By way of a change of employment, which is always interesting, I next directed my attention to explore the literary treasures of the rooms; and while I was turning over the leaves of the last new novel but five hundred, the postman brought the newspaper and laid it on the table, and as I was hesitating and debating the matter with myself whether or not I should take up the paper and read it, Dr. Bragge came into the

rooms, and taking possession of it, sat down in a shady corner to peruse the intelligence.

“There is something exceedingly pleasant in getting into a shady corner in sunshiny weather, and there is also something truly delightful in so retired a spot as Sloppesley, to see, by means of the newspapers, what is going on in the great world, so that I might metaphorically call Sloppesley a shady corner of the kingdom. I say metaphorically, for literally it is certainly not very shady, seeing that there are no lofty rocks, nor high trees, nor elevated buildings, to cast much shadow. Indeed the only fault I have to find with Sloppesley is the impossibility of getting out of the sunshine in clear hot weather. Still, however, this is a thing of which we ought not to complain, for there are many days in the course of the year in which we should be glad to see a little sunshine. I only wish that Lord Byron, who has made such lamentable complaints about the want of sunshine in England,

had spent a fine day at Sloppesley, for then he would have seen sunshine enough.

“After I had amused myself till I was quite tired, with turning over the leaves of the newest novel I could find, I once more had recourse to variety of occupation by examining the various trinkets, feathers, caps, toys, and such like articles, which form no small part of the attraction at the rooms. As I did not lay out any money at the rooms this morning, I thought it not fair to occupy more than two hours and a half in looking about me, and as the tide was now coming in, and as there was great probability I should get sight of the sea water, I returned again to the beach to watch the progress of the tide.

“Very interesting indeed was the sight of the water gradually but rapidly covering the sands, and overwhelming the sea-weeds which had been exposed at low water. The sea is a beautiful object, and it suggests very beautiful thoughts ;

it suggested to me many interesting meditations on the fluctuations of human life; and while I was absorbed in contemplation, I suddenly was awakened from my reverie by hearing a loud explosion, which seemed to come from the rooms, and I found afterwards that it was occasioned by the opening of a bottle of ginger beer for Dr. Bragge. Indeed, during the warm weather, scarcely a day passes without the opening of a bottle or two of ginger-beer, which, by the explosion of the cork, adds much to the liveliness of the town. As there was nothing particular in the newspaper this morning, Dr. Bragge did not spend more than an hour and a half in perusing it, and as the day was remarkably fine, he was induced to take a walk on the beach. We passed twice, and both of us spoke in encomiastic terms of the weather. I returned in due time to the lodgings to dinner; but so fine was the day that I was tempted to stroll out again, and to take another walk by the sea-side; and as before dinner I watched the tide

coming in, after dinner I watched it going out. These are the delights of a fine day at Sloppesley."

The next paper, which appeared the following year in the pocket-book, is entitled,

"A WET DAY AT SLOPPESLEY."

"Although I cannot boast of graphic powers equal to those of the talented young lady who in the last year's pocket-book delineated and set forth in such fascinating terms the delights of a fine day at Sloppesley, yet I would willingly contribute my mite, according to the best of my humble ability, to illustrate and immortalise that most select and genteel watering place. It is my lot to speak of a wet day at Sloppesley, so that my subject itself precludes all hope of shining.

"My occupations at Blunderton are too numerous to allow me a long absence from home, but having heard so much of the great gentility of Sloppesley as a watering place, I resolved upon snatching a little time from busi-

ness, and spending three days at that town. Unfortunately for me all the three days were wet—sopping, soaking, dripping wet. I travelled on the outside of the coach, that I might husband my resources, and have as much as possible to spend at Sloppesley. It rained all the way, and with such remorseless perseverance as if it were resolved never to leave off. The first sight of a strange place in wet weather, towards evening, is by no means prepossessing. The houses at Sloppesley are built with brick which may look nice and brown in dry weather, but the effect of rain is to make them perfectly black, which is quite the reverse of lively. I consoled myself, however, with the thought that though the evening of my arrival was wet, the next day might be fine, but the next day was wet, and so was the next, and so was the next. This was rather mortifying, for I had been reading with peculiar delight and satisfaction, the exquisite description of a fine day at Sloppesley, and I was full of anticipation that I also should enjoy a

fine day there. In this, however, I was disappointed; but as it is an ill wind that blows nobody good, there sprang up from my disappointment this counterbalancing circumstance, that it furnished me with means and materials to write an article for the Blunderton Pocket-book, which I could not have presumed to do had my sojourn been there in fine weather. I shall here speak only of one day, for the others were so exactly like it, that when I have described one I have described all three. I had the honour of lodging in the house of Moses Clarke, Esq., grocer, tea-dealer, cheesemonger, haberdasher, ironmonger, and linen-draper, at that time mayor of Sloppesley. The house is situated immediately opposite to the town hall, which is so near, that from the front windows of the house nothing but the hall is to be seen, a building by no means picturesque, and sadly lacking that variety of feature which is so desirable in an object at which one is under the necessity of looking all day long. That side of the building which was

opposite the apartment in which I lodged, had no windows, but was decorated with a most gorgeous painting of the king's arms, executed in the days, though probably not by the hand, of Sir Godfrey Kneller. The roof of the hall projects so much as evidently to have preserved the painting from that decay which usually makes such havoc with out-door specimens of pictorial art. The room in which I was situated was evidently what is called a furnished apartment, that is, an apartment with scarcely any furniture in it. It was about twelve feet long and eleven feet wide, having a narrow casement window, at the top of which was nailed a narrow slip of scarlet moreen with a bit of fringe as an apology for a window curtain: the lower half of the window was ornamented with a muslin blind, which will be white when it is washed. It was some time before I could divine for what purpose this blind was put up, for there were no opposite windows from whence curiously impertinent people could look into the room, and as the

apartment was up-stairs, over the shop, no passer by could look in. I concluded at length, after much conjecture, that the only use of the blind must be to prevent the occupant of the room from being annoyed by the everlasting stare of the great flat-faced, square-mouthed, goggle-eyed lion, in the king's arms upon the wall of the town hall, who, instead of minding his business and looking attentively on the armorial bearings, after the example of his modest colleague the unicorn, kept his stupidly grinning face continually gazing in at the first floor windows of Moses Clarke, Alderman of the ancient borough of Sloppesley. I shall remember that beast—I don't mean Moses Clarke, but the lion—as long as I live. As the day was wet I had an opportunity of observing the furniture of my apartment, indeed I had nothing else to do, and all the literary amusement I could obtain was reading '*Honi soit qu'il mal y pense.*'

“On the floor of the room was a small carpet, in pattern and in texture most strikingly resem-

bling a horse rug, and not much exceeding one in size. There were six chairs made of thin black sticks ornamented with gilt gingerbread dabs of lackered brass, and having seats of cane work all so marvellously light, that though I scarcely weigh ten stone, I was almost afraid to sit down on one of them. There was also a sofa in the room, very high, very hard, and having a very narrow seat. In addition to these articles was a dingy dog's eared Pembroke table—I call it dog's eared, because the leaves were villanously thin and very much warped; it had four slender legs, but it was so economical in the use of them as never to stand upon more than three of them at one time. On the chimney-piece were two stone oranges, one stone apple, and a pair of Derbyshire spar candlesticks with a few drops of wax upon them, put on them for mere show, for I don't believe they ever had wax candles in them since they were made. The only other article in the apartment was a meagre-looking glass in a thin gilt frame, surmounted by an

enamelled cottage: the glass itself was of that peculiar kind which reflects the face in such a distorted fashion that one cannot recognise one's own features in it. The furniture of this room, together with the king's arms on the wall of the town-hall, was all the amusement which I had at Sloppesley for three days. I once thought that I might send to the rooms to obtain a novel to read, but I then recollected that I could read novels at Blunderton, and I did not come to Sloppesley for pleasures that I might have at home; besides, I was hoping every minute that the rain would cease.

“ After I had finished my breakfast I was not left altogether without employment, for as my landlord was mayor of Sloppesley, and had but one maid servant in his house and one apprentice in his shop, all hands were too much engaged to pay much attention to a lodger, therefore the breakfast apparatus was left standing on the table. I found some entertainment in breaking the egg shells into very small pieces. I balanced

the tea spoon first upon one finger, then upon another, and last of all upon my thumb. I then spun round the lid of the sugar dish. I then poured the water out of the slop basin into the tea cup. I next went to the window and watched the rain as it poured down from the roof of the town-hall, and I stared at the broad-faced grinning lion till I verily thought the beast increased the intensity and insolence of its grin, and I believe, but I am not quite certain, that I made faces at it in return. I walked up and down the room with as much impatience as a hyena in a cage. I looked at my image in the looking glass, and could make neither head nor tail of it. About half past eleven the maid came up to take away the breakfast things, and to ask me at what time I would be pleased to dine. I was going to reply, but was suddenly taken with a violent fit of yawning, and before I got my jaws closed, the mayor required the presence of his domestic, so that the decision respecting dinner was suspended for the present. The rain con-

tinued—the town-hall was still, like Niobe, all in tears,—the ugly red-ochre lion kept up its impertinent grin, as if it were mightily amused at my imprisonment, and was bent at laughing at my distress. I actually began to hate the beast, and if I had been an Irishman I should have sent it a challenge.

“The town of Sloppesley is not paved nor Mac-Adamised, so that in rainy weather it is completely macmudamised; I was, therefore, prevented from walking out to see the town, but I had the consolation of being told that there was nothing in the town worth seeing except the town-hall, and that the key had been lost for fifty years, and that it was impossible to have a new key made or the door broken open without a special act of Parliament, an expense which the town could not support. I was told that, though I could not see the inside of the building, I could see the outside of it, and that I could not have a better view of it than from the window of the room in which I lodged. As day

advanced, and as my breakfast apparatus was taken away, so that I had no more egg shells to crumble, and no spoons to balance on my finger and thumb, nor any lid of a sugar basin to spin upon the table, nor any slop-water to pour out of one vessel into another,—as I had ceased to enjoy the sight of my own visage distorted into all possible and impossible, conceivable and inconceivable forms, by the streaky looking-glass,—as I was more and more horrified by the sight of the nasty ugly beast of a lion, and began to be almost afraid of looking out at window, lest the brute should roar at me or jump into the room and eat me up, I felt more and more the want of some occupation, and should have been thankful if anybody had given me a peck of peas to shell. Sending to the rooms for a book was quite out of the question, for the mayor of Sloppesley's only domestic had other fish to fry. I even ventured, at length, to ask the mayor himself for a book,—any book, on any subject. I had my choice of any volume

of Burn's Justice—I wished all the volumes down the mayor's throat, or the lion's either, for the brute had his mouth open wide enough to swallow them two at a time. At length the hour of dinner came, and though the mayor's larder afforded me no better fare than two smoky mutton chops and three dirty potatoes, on a broken plate, I was furnished with better employment than reading Burn's Justice, or grinning at the wearisome brute over the way. Thinks I to myself, perhaps it will not rain to-morrow—but it did, and then my hope was, that it would not rain next day; but it rained the next as much as it had rained on the two preceding days, and more too, if possible.

“ I was, therefore, forced to leave Sloppesley without seeing its beauties, but certainly not without seeing its deformities, one of the greatest of which is the ugly lion on the king's arms. I am glad I am not king, for I would rather have no arms at all than have them supported by such an ugly brute as that. I am sorry I did not

see the rooms, for I am told that they have a very fine and extensive prospect, and that from them, were it not for the rotundity of the earth and the imperfection of human vision, you might see the Antipodes.

“ Sloppesley, farewell, and when I come again,
I hope for finer weather and less rain.”



AMATEUR CONCERTS.

morning and Saturday night, was Hook's Lessons and the Battle of Prague. I am, therefore, under the necessity of explaining the cause of the mighty revolution which has taken place. The revolution at Blunderton, like all other revolutions, has been owing to more causes than one; one of the principal, no doubt, must be the march of intellect—this, of course, is taken for granted. What an immense deal of marching intellect has had of late years; I wonder it is not marched off its legs—but perhaps it does not carry much baggage. As auxiliary to the march of intellect, in developing the musical taste and talent of the good people of Blunderton, may be mentioned the three following facts, viz. the death of our old dancing-master, the erection of a new organ in the parish church, and the performance of a musical festival in the county town, for the benefit, as was said, of the county hospital, but for the benefit, as it proved, of two or three crack singers, and of three or four dozen cracked ditto.

To speak of these matters in proper order and with due arrangement, we first mention the death of our old dancing-master, for, had he lived to the present day, we of Blunderton should have remained dead as ever to the charms of music, insensible to the merits, as well as unconscious of the existence, of Mozart, Beethoven, Winter, and Rossini. Our old dancing-master was the musical dictator of Blunderton—the grand monopoliser of melody—he was the only teacher of dancing and the only professor of music—he played the old organ at our parish church with that fine twiddling style of shaking every note, that it seemed as though the instrument were suffering under a fit of the ague—and he taught all the young ladies in the town to play the piano-forte, beginning with Hook's Lessons, and finishing with the Battle of Prague, and they generally ceased to practice when he had ceased to teach; for the Battle of Prague was perfection, and what more than perfection could be desired? Nobody but he ever thought of teaching music

in Blunderton;—but the time came at last when he could teach no longer, and when he was gone there were more than one or two ready to jump into his shoes, and to supply the vacancy occasioned by his death.

Mrs. Frumpshaw, who is a lady of fashion as well as a school-mistress at Blunderton, and whose patronage of the sciences and the fine arts is a matter of no small moment to itinerant and resident professors, forthwith, and without consulting any one, introduced a music and dancing-master, and thought, of course, that the vacancy was supplied. But the situation of organist at the church was not in the gift of Mrs. Frumpshaw, and to say the truth, most of the influential inhabitants took it in dudgeon, that this lady should be pleased to dictate to the town in the matter of music; they, therefore, were fully resolved upon not electing this new dancing-master to the office of organist. With all appearance, however, of candour and fair dealing, an advertisement was put into the

Blunderton Chronicle, informing the musical talent of the town, the county, and the kingdom, that the place of organist at the parish church of Blunderton was vacant, and that on application to the churchwardens any competent person might have an opportunity of exhibiting a specimen of his talents. Of course Mr. Prigg, the protégé of Mrs. Frumpshaw, sent in his name as a candidate, in the full confidence that his own great talents and the influence of his patroness would carry all before them. I do not say that Mr. Prigg had no faults, but if he had any, certainly modesty was not one of them, and whatever he might think of others, he clearly thought by no means humbly of himself. He was a short thick-set little man, bustling in his manners, confident in his address; his gait resembled that of a young bantam cock new to the world and not yet humbled by his betters; he looked on music as the first of sciences, and on himself as the first of professors. When he entered the organ

loft he surveyed the poor old organ from top to toe with the coolest contempt and pity, as if he thought it an act of condescension to place his scientific fingers on such an humble instrument. When he began to play, Mrs. Frumpshaw cast her eyes round about on the congregation, looking for symptoms of approbation, and seeming to say, "There's fine playing!" But none of the genteeler part of the audience appeared to sympathise with the lady's rapture. The mayor sat with his mouth screwed up and his eyes cast upwards to the roof of the church as if he was meditating some bitter criticism against the performer, or as if he did not care a fig for the music and was thinking of something else. The churchwardens looked glum, and the rector looked grave. In a word, nobody partook* of Mrs. Frumpshaw's rapture save and except the parish clerk and the sexton, who did not know that by rights they ought not to have been pleased with Mr. Prigg's performance. Mr. Prigg was not angry that his performance did

not give universal satisfaction, for he possessed so much of his own good opinion that he cared not for that of any one else.

On the following Sunday, another candidate was heard, whose playing was decidedly better than, though not nearly so fine as, that of Mr. Prigg. The second candidate, who bore the name of Ghrimes, was decidedly successful, even though Mr. Prigg sneered, smiled, and took snuff all church time; and though Mrs. Frumpshaw frowned her most awful disapprobation. Mr. Ghrimes was a good sort of a man, but very much of a musical pedant, devoted to his profession because he loved it, and not merely because he felt it as a means of exciting self-esteem. After the election of Mr. Ghrimes, it was found that Mrs. Frumpshaw and Mr. Prigg were not without their partisans; the town, as it usually happens in such cases, was divided into two factions—musical factions—filling the place with harmonious discord. The two factions were distinguished by the euphonious names

of Ghrimites and Priggites. Every individual with or without ear, taste, or talent for the science, forthwith became musical out of spite, and began to play on some instrument, or to cultivate the human voice. Presently the Ghrimites found out that the old organ was not good enough for so talented a man as Mr. Ghrimes to play upon, and therefore a suggestion was thrown out in the "valuable columns" of the Blunderton Chronicle, that it would be desirable to erect a new organ. Thereupon all the Priggites set their faces against the abominable, wasteful, scandalous, shocking, extravagant, and profligate expenditure of the public money. The patriots of Blunderton were all on the alert; they were active at vestry meetings, eloquent at public houses, argumentative in the newspaper, and even went so far as to chalk upon the walls, "no new organ," "dam Ghrimes," "Prigg for ever," "down with the mare." The mayor shook in his shoes at these unequivocal demon-

strations of a revolutionary spirit in the town of Blunderton; but he was determined to carry his point, for he was one of the most zealous partisans of the new organ party; and some persons have actually gone so far as to say that he gave a boy a penny to write on the wall, "dam them as dams Grimes." The inscription was written, but whether the mayor paid for it or not is not ascertained, and at all events he did not pay for it out of the corporation funds.

The Ghrimites had also an active supporter in the person of the spirited and talented editor of the Blunderton Chronicle, who, although he was impartial enough to admit into his paper the epistolary communications of the Priggites, yet he completely demolished their arguments, and proved to the satisfaction of himself and his party that a new organ would cost next to nothing, so that a wag of the Priggite faction proposed at a vestry meeting to sell the old organ and buy a new one with part of the money. And indeed, to hear Mr. Prigg talk at this time,

one might have thought such a proposition feasible; for notwithstanding the ineffable disdain with which he had himself regarded the old organ, and the contemptuous terms in which he had spoken of it as a miserable box of whistles, he now began to speak of it as a musical treasure, and to talk in very knowing and scientific phrase of the richness, soundness, fulness, crispness, and all that sort of thing, of the tones of the instrument, and he positively declared that so far from its being any worse for age, it was infinitely better, and that it was far superior to any organ that any modern artist could build, and he generally took care to intimate in no very obscure terms that the parish was not in want of a good organ, but of a good organist.

In spite, however, of all opposition, a new organ was erected, and of course a grand musical kick up was had in the church on the occasion of opening the organ. The tickets to this entertainment were very reasonable,

but Mrs. Frumpshaw would not attend it, nor would she suffer any one of her young ladies to go. All the Priggites too were unanimous in expressing their utter abhorrence of that most impious profanation, as they called it, of converting the sacred edifice of the church into a place of public amusement. All the Priggites were of opinion that the new organ was not near so good as the old one, and that Mr. Ghrimes did not know how to play it. But, notwithstanding the opposition of the Priggites, Mr. Ghrimes increased and extended his professional connexions in Blunderton, and he took great pains to train up a certain number of young men and women to sing psalms at church. Furthermore he selected some of the most skilful of them, and instructed them in the choruses of Handel, and he was very proud of them and they were very proud of themselves. Not long after this it happened, as we have mentioned above, that a musical festival was celebrated at the county town for the benefit

of the county hospital. To assist at this entertainment Mr. Prigg and Mr. Ghrimes were both engaged, and the latter took with him a small, but select band of chorus-singers, who contributed their share of voice and received their share of compliment. Mr. Ghrimes also was highly commended for the diligence and skill with which he had disciplined his singers, and was strenuously urged to persevere in such a laudable course; for thus by degrees the county might have within itself the materials for a musical festival on no mean scale.

Pleased with his success, Mr. Ghrimes, on his return home to Blunderton, set himself to the work of drilling with more ardour than ever. The number of his chorus-singers increased, and now and then, as a particular favour, he admitted a few particular friends to hear the performance. Now in singing these choruses, divers young men and women had been initiated into the mysteries of musical notation, had ascertained the meaning of the words *forte* and *piano*, had

learned to distinguish between crotchets and quavers, and minims, and all the rest of it, so that they looked upon themselves, forsooth, as scientific singers, and up to anything in the vocal art. As soon, therefore, as they were almost able to sing choruses, not ludicrously, they felt and fancied themselves first-rate singers. Mr. Ghrimes also did himself think that by introducing into their practising some of the recitatives and airs of the oratorios, the performance of the choruses would follow with better effect. There was no difficulty to find persons ready to execute the solos, but the difficulty was, how to manage the matter without giving offence, for in Mr. Ghrimes's musical party every boy was a Braham, and every girl was a *prima donna*. In a marvellously short time Mr. Ghrimes and his friends were able, after a fashion, to get through an oratorio. By degrees the number of particular friends, who were admitted as hearers on these occasions, began to increase somewhat inconveniently, and as the performances were every

where spoken of with great applause, the matter soon ceased to be private, and so, in order to accommodate the performers with room to make a greater display, a room was hired at the King's Head, and, in order to defray the expense of the room, and its fitting up, all lovers of sacred music were invited to contribute a small annual subscription, and thereupon was formed the first amateur musical society in Blunderton.

And was Mr. Prigg indifferent to all this? Did he view with placid contentment these mighty strides of Mr. Ghrimes to place himself in the chair of musical dictator in the town of Blunderton? Was Mrs. Frumpshaw insensible to this attempt to place an extinguisher on poor Mr. Prigg? By no means. The Priggites were all on the alert, every movement of the Ghrimites was known to them, and canvassed by them with no small degree of acerbity. Many and pungent were the jokes and witticisms passed among them on the solo performances, at what they called the King's Head Oratorios. But however bitterly

they spoke of these matters in private and among themselves, they professed a mighty degree of amiableness towards their rivals, and said that it was very laudable in Mr. Ghrimes to cultivate sacred music for the amusement and edification of the good people of Blunderton; but at the same time, as there were many valuable and important compositions of great interest which could not be classed among sacred performances, Mr. Prigg, anxious to contribute to the amusement and musical improvement of the inhabitants of the town, had resolved on getting up, with the assistance of a few friends, a miscellaneous amateur concert; and, in order to let it be understood that no opposition was intended against Mr. Ghrimes, the performances were fixed for a different day in the week. A paragraph to that effect was inserted by the Priggite faction in the Blunderton Chronicle. Alas, alas, for the honour of human nature! I am compelled to say that all this apparent cordiality and kindness, which the Priggites professed towards the

Ghrimites, was mere hypocrisy, and a cloak to cover the designs of the former, to make serious inroads on the party of the latter, for Mr. Prigg and his friends thought that the people of Blunderton would not readily run after the music of Handel, when they could hear that of Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber.

For a time the Priggites seemed to succeed, and then the Ghrimites took up opera music in self defence, and on the other hand the Priggites alternated their performances also with sacred music; and thus two amateur concerts were established in the town of Blunderton. It was a matter of astonishment to many, that the inhabitants of this place, who a very few years ago neither knew nor cared anything about music, should now all on a sudden be almost music mad. But in good truth there was not much in the matter to marvel at, for there was no real love of music in the affair at all. The great mass of the Ghrimites and the Priggites could scarcely tell the difference between Handel and Weber, and

to nine out of ten of them, one of Hook's lessons would have been much the same as the overture to *Der Freyschütz*. Party spirit was the great musical stimulant in Blunderton: the people sung, fiddled, and listened, out of mere spite to their neighbours. There might indeed be another motive with no small part of the audience, and that was the pleasure of having something to do, or, more properly speaking, an excuse for doing nothing. The performers, too, were amply gratified by hearing themselves make a very great noise. They affected to think that the town must be infinitely obliged to them for condescending to sing and to play for nothing, whereas they had greater pleasure in being heard, than the audience had in hearing them. Mr. Prigg was particularly jealous, however, of any appearance of inattention in his audience. As leader of the band, he flourished his fiddle-stick with most awful dignity, and seemed to expect of his audience as profound and reverential an attention, as a judge on the bench

demands of a prisoner on whom he is passing sentence.

These amateur concerts have now been established some years, and form an essential part of the amusement and occupation of the town. To such a degree of perfection have both parties arrived, that there is nothing too difficult for them; indeed, the more difficult the music is the better they like it.

The first commencement of these amateur concerts was under the pretext of preparing and training a set of singers for choruses in musical festivals, but as musical festivals of late have not answered in that part of the country, these chorus singers have not been in requisition; and perhaps it is well that they have not, for I cannot imagine how such prime singers as our Blunderton amateurs could ever condescend to sing anything but the principal parts;—they were like the troop of volunteers that was raised in Coggeshall, in Essex, some twenty or thirty years ago, and which consisted of nothing but officers.

In fact, Handel's music is a great deal too easy for them; the Priggites, in particular, speak very contemptuously of this great composer, and talk of him as one who had not by any means a full apprehension of the powers of harmony or the capacities of melody, so that the oratorio music is performed by the Priggites in a very careless slovenly manner, without any regard to time or tune,—not that they cannot do it better, only they think it is not worth while to do it better; they fancy that they perform it quite as well as it deserves to be performed. The audience too is greatly delighted and enraptured with the music as it is executed, and why, therefore, should there be any effort to do that better which is done well enough for those for whom it is done.

Within the last year the Italian music, especially opera music, has been all the rage. It is thought exceedingly vulgar and unscientific in Blunderton to sing any English songs or to perform any music by an English composer.

Mr. Prigg, indeed, went so far as once to contemplate hiring the theatre for the purpose of performing Mozart's opera of Don Giovanni, but Mrs. Frumpshaw protested against it as a most immoral and dangerous production, and the Ghrimite faction declared that they would go on purpose to hiss. So the promising scheme was given up.

Some lovers of music in the town have thought that the union of the two parties would produce a very effective band of performers, but others have more sagaciously thought that their separate existence is essential to their being, and that if they were to come together they would come to nought; that while there is a rivalry between them, one will not give up lest it should appear to be conquered or outdone by the other. Thus the rivalry goes on, and though the same audience is for the most part to be found at both places, yet both have their respective partisans. The Ghrimites can hear nothing good at the Priggite concerts, and the Priggites are quite

astonished that the Ghrimites should think themselves musicians. The rude things that they say of one another are quite shocking. The Ghrimites say that Mr. Prigg's violin sounds like the squeaking of a pig in windy weather. The Priggites say that the principal female singer in the Ghrimite orchestra, screams like a peacock, and has no more notion of modulation than a handsaw.

The two parties also write letters in the *Blunderton Chronicle*, in which each sets forth its own excellency, and exhibits to the gaze of an astonished world the utter stupidity of the other. The editor of the *Blunderton Chronicle* is himself a decided partisan of the Ghrimite faction, and therefore favours the public and his own party with a frequent paragraph of most laudatory criticism. There are also a few pens of ready writers among the Priggites who send volunteer criticisms on their own performances to the *Chronicle*, but the editor, as if anxious to remove from his own shoulders the

responsibility of any such criticism, always inserts the communication as "from a correspondent." Amateur criticism on amateur concerts is truly very amusing. The performance is always most excellent, or wo betide the critic if it is not; and really it is very troublesome to be under the necessity, week after week, of collecting together a string of laudatory phrases applicable to all varieties of sounds, praising the fiddlers and praising the fiddlesticks, praising the drummers and praising the drumsticks, praising the songs and praising the singers; praising, in fact, every performer for every part of every performance. The editor of the Blunderton Chronicle is in the situation of an admiral writing despatches after a victory, who has to speak highly of the bravery of this officer and the promptitude of another, and the fortitude of another; and at length is compelled to say they all acted so well, that it is impossible to say who acted best. Indeed, so far as my observation goes, all the performers in the two orchestras in

Blunderton are the best of all possible performers, and they select the best of all possible music, and play it in the best of all possible styles. I don't think that any one of them would give a straw for criticism at all short of this. If they are sometimes out of time or out of tune, or miss a bar, or play one twice over,—or if some two or three in an overture have done before the rest, —or if now and then they have to play a bar or two in half the usual time in order to make up for time that has been lost,—why all that can be said of the matter is, that they had a design in it, as the Spectator had in sometimes writing a dull paper. Long life and prosperity to the Blunderton Amateur Concerts.

ITINERANT LECTURERS.



ITINERANT LECTURERS.

THERE are three conditions of a people with regard to the matter of knowledge: the first is when knowledge is only to be acquired with the utmost difficulty and by means of great labour and perseverance; the second is when knowledge is rendered generally accessible; and the third is when knowledge is so exceedingly abundant, and presents itself in such a variety of forms and with an indefatigable application, that it is impossible to avoid it. It is a great while ago since England was in the first mentioned condition; it has been for many years in the second, and is making rapid strides towards, if it have not already arrived at, the third.

Considering the increasingly early days at which children begin to learn, compared with what was the practice in former times, and considering the immense range of literature and science into which they are introduced, I should not wonder to see in a short time a practical refutation of Locke's doctrine, of "no innate ideas"—by finding that infants are born with a competent knowledge of the rudiments of Greek and Latin grammar, and of the first elements of natural science. At present, however, this is not the case; but who could ever have anticipated the effects which have been produced by gas and steam? As one great instrument of extending scientific knowledge into the darkest corners of the earth may be enumerated the system of itinerant lecturing.

Itinerant lecturers are a species of intellectual comets, at which all the little fixed stars in a country town stare with amazement. Blunder-ton has of late years had its share of them—they have come here, one after another, hawking

chemistry, history, astronomy, botany, architecture, physiology, and some half dozen other ologies, greatly no doubt to the edification of all the wiseacres of the town. But I much fear that they have been for the most part only bringing coals to Newcastle, not that the whole town of Blunderton is saturated with science, but that scarcely any, save the scientific, can be found to attend the itinerant scientific lecturers. Stay, stay—I am wrong; others do attend them, but do not attend to them. For instance, Mrs. Frumpshaw is a highly scientific personage, but the young ladies of Mrs. Frumpshaw's establishment are not scientific, yet they frequently attend scientific lectures accompanied by their governess. Schools, though admitted at half price, are generally the best part of an itinerant lecturer's audience. I rather think that Blunderton is mainly indebted to the scientific reputation of Mrs. Frumpshaw, for the frequent visits of this kind with which it is favoured. Lecturers therefore generally first apply them-

selves to obtain the patronage or at least the approbation of Mrs. Frumpshaw; but as their lectures must have the permission of the worshipful the mayor, they are often announced as being under his worshipful patronage, and his worship sometimes attends in person, though he cares no more about chemistry than a horse.

The usual scene for our itinerant lecturers at Blunderton is the great room at the King's Head Inn, and the usual attendance is, in the first place, Mrs. Frumpshaw, accompanied by some fifteen or sixteen of her pupils. In the next place, there are two or three young ladies who have been young ladies time out of mind. In the next place, there may be the mayor, if the mayor for the time being is at all inclined to patronise the sciences. In the next place is the editor of the Blunderton Chronicle, who takes a ticket or two in payment for his advertisements, and who also attends professionally as a critic, both to take a report of, and to pronounce sentence upon, the lecture. Besides the above named,

there are about half a dozen Blunderton *savans*, who know all about everything. The first and chief of these is a tall thin man, with an aquiline nose, and grey hair, and having that sort of look that seems to wonder at himself for being so wise. He keeps a small day-school, and he talks to the boys in such lofty language that they can never understand him, which makes them, of course, gape with astonishment at his profound wisdom. His elucidations of the obscurities and intricacies of Dilworth's spelling book, are somewhat after the style of Johnson's Dictionary, which defines "higgledypiggledy" to be "conglomeration and confusion." This gentleman's name is Pipes; you may often see him, after school hours, lounging at the bookseller's shop, looking at the lists of new publications, and ready to afford any information on any literary topic, to any stranger who may be in his way. If you are in doubt about the spelling of a word, he can set you right to a certainty; if you lack geographical knowledge, he can supply

it: he can tell you the distance from Blunderton to any town or village in the county; if you are at a loss on matters of history or chronology, there also he will stand your friend; he can tell you in what year King John signed *Magna Charta*, and when the young princes were smothered in the Tower. In a word, you cannot go into the shop when he is there without getting into conversation with him; whether the information which he may communicate to you be altogether new or not, must, of course, depend on the nature of your own stores.

Next to Mr. Pipes is Mr. Leatherbrash, a highly distinguished optician, botanist, chemist, geologist, anatomist, and general scientificalist. Mr. Leatherbrash has his house fitted up with all kinds of scientific gimcracks—he has a regiment of thermometers—and a whole army of barometers—and he regularly, three times every day of his life, not even Sundays excepted, takes down in writing an exact report of these instruments. If you should be shown into his study

when he is not there, don't look at yourself in the small ebony-framed looking-glass that hangs over the chimney-piece, for if you do, you will see your face stretched as long as your arm; and don't, by any means, try the other glass which hangs near the door, for if you look into that you will fancy yourself the author of "Broad Grins." The best thing that you can do, if you are alone in that room, is, to sit down quietly, if you can find an empty chair, and meddle with nothing, for Mr. Leatherbrash will kindly inform you, when he comes, of all the mysteries of the various philosophical apparatus which you see about you. He will be quite delighted to knock you down with his electric battery, and that not as a joke, for he is farthest from a joke of any man I ever saw, but he will enjoy it as a striking illustration of scientific principles. Mr. Leatherbrash has a fine collection of fossils, which he has almost entirely collected for himself, and for the formation of which he has ransacked almost every chalk-pit within five miles of Blunderton;

and you are no company for Mr. Leatherbrash unless you will talk, or let him talk, of geology and philosophy in general. This gentleman, from the interest which he takes in science, attends all the lectures of the scientific itinerants, and frequently supplies them with some facts, or with some new theory which he has discovered, or which he fancies he has discovered.

There is one more of the Blunderton philosophers who demands particular notice in this paper, and that is the gentleman whom we designate as the astronomer. This is a middle aged bachelor, who was crossed in love when he was but eighteen years of age, and ever since that time, which is now about thirty years ago, he has given himself up, heart and soul, to the study of astronomy. For the earth on which he lives he scarcely cares a straw ; he regards it merely as a place whereon to fix his telescope, and wherefrom to gaze upon the moon and planets, and to speculate upon the stars and comets. White's

Ephemeris is his constant companion, and he regards the art of printing as of no other use than merely to multiply almanacs withal. If he were to speak of the science of numbers, he would call it the means of calculating eclipses. In his study of astronomy he is so accustomed to millions of miles, that he can never speak of miles but by millions; and one day when he was asked how far it was to Sloppesley, he said that he believed it to be about eighteen millions of miles. He cares much more about the satellites of Jupiter than about the development of the reform bill; and the faintest nebulous appearance in the heavens, interests him much more than the repeal of the malt tax. All those abuses in church and state, which are subjects of grief and heart-breaking to nine-tenths of his majesty's liege subjects, affect him not with half as much sorrow as a passing cloud during an eclipse. You could as soon pull away a pig from his half emptied trough, as you could drag him away from his telescope when sun or moon

is in eclipse. His passion for comets is intense—he almost worships them; when he speaks of one that has been, or that is to come, he flies out into such a rhapsody about the dear, the beautiful, the interesting, the delightful creature, that you would fancy it to be an old maid talking of a lap dog, or a young maid talking of her lover. As lecturers on astronomy were the only ones known at Blunderton thirty years ago, this gentleman attended them, and so acquired from thence the habit of going to hear all other lecturers, whatever their subject might be, not that he knows, hears, or heeds a single word that is said on any other topic than astronomy, for his head is altogether among the stars. But he is a kind-hearted man, and very sociable, and that induces him to seem to sympathise with all sorts of scientific pursuits. In addition to these three already specified, there are a few more of minor note, who have nothing to do, and don't know how to do it. These are very glad of the arrival of an itinerant lecturer in the town, or

even of a conjuror, for it affords them a pleasant occupation, and they can look as knowing as the wisest. Some two or three of this description will congregate round the lecturer's table after the lecture is over, and will discourse most profoundly and knowingly with the professor; and these scientific idlers, although they have no actual knowledge of the matters which they so fluently discourse about, yet they have numerous ingenious theories of their own on every science that can be named. It is not, however, to be supposed that all the itinerant hawkers and pedlers of universal wisdom are quite so fortunate as the description above seems to intimate concerning some of them.

Astronomy is generally successful, provided it be not too scientific, and provided there be a plentiful exhibition of transparencies. Chemistry, also, has its patrons, yet I have seen a chemical lecturer waiting in the great room in the King's Head nearly two hours for an audience, and at last having his tickets brought to him in the

same state and number as he gave them out to those who should have sold them, and who would indeed have sold them had they been able to find purchasers. The people at Blunderton are a very queer set—remarkably odd, singular, extraordinary, and out of the way ; I dare say you will not meet with such another set till you come to the next town. They are not always in the humour to patronise science, and are sometimes content to do without a philosophical lecture for three months together, yet they are seldom three months without a philosophical lecturer.

Sometimes I have seen a most elaborate prospectus put forth, promising by a course of six lectures to put the people of Blunderton in possession of as much wisdom as Solomon himself possessed, and after all no one has gone to the lecture save Mr. Pipes himself, who, instead of receiving any information from the lecturer, has perhaps communicated to him abundance of knowledge. Herein, however, let it not be supposed that I am speaking a word in dispa-

ragement of the lecturer either as to his ability or inclination to instruct, but the fact is, that our worthy friend Mr. Pipes, who can sit as still as a mouse, and be as mute as a fish, when others are with him in a lecture room to set him an example of attention and to keep him in countenance in the matter of silence, is very much disposed in a *tête-à-tête* to have all the talk to himself and to give rather than receive instruction; and Mr. Pipes is one of that numerous class of geniuses who are not so remarkable for knowing one thing in particular as all things in general; and if at any time his school should fall off and he should undertake the profession of itinerant lecturer, there is no subject that would suit him so well to lecture upon as things in general.

Of late years we have had in Blunderton occasional visits from professors of writing, who have the honour respectfully to inform the nobility, gentry, and inhabitants in general of Blunderton and its vicinity, that the noble art

of penmanship hitherto so grossly and scandalously neglected has at length been brought to a most unparalleled and unheard of degree of perfection by Professor Mac Scratch, who, in consequence of the most earnest and pressing solicitations of several persons of distinction in this neighbourhood, has snatched a few days from his numerous engagements to visit this town, and proposes in three lessons to convert the most execrable scrawl into the fairest and finest handwriting imaginable. Specimens may be seen at Mr. Dabble's Stationer, Bookseller, Bookbinder, Music Seller, Tea dealer, Perfumer, Hatter, Haberdasher, Printer, and Glover, Market Place, Blunderton. Professor Mac Scratch recommends an early application, as his stay in Blunderton is necessarily short. Who the persons of distinction are by whom Professor Mac Scratch was invited to Blunderton it is not easy to ascertain, they seem to treat him with great neglect when he comes, for they never call upon him at his lodg-

ings, nor invite him to their houses, nor avail themselves of his caligraphic aid, nor even send him a single pupil; for all his learners are found peradventure to be some youth whose genius and attainments fit him for the place of usher in a school, and some milliner's apprentice whose fingers having been cramped by the use of the needle are not very free in handling the pen. These pupils find in three lessons that their writing is marvellously altered while they are attending to the illustrious Professor Mac Scratch, but before the professor has got to the ten mile stone, on his way to London, his pupils write much the same as they did before, and find that what was bred in the bone will never be out of the flesh.

Greek and Latin are almost out of fashion, or one might expect professors to itinerate teaching these languages; and really I don't see why half a dozen lectures at the great room at the King's Head should not be quite as competent to convey to the audience a knowledge of the ancient lan-

guages of Greece and Rome as it is supposed that the same number of discourses can teach chemistry or any of the ologies. This lecture system is truly a very pleasant mode of communicating knowledge. You have nothing to do but to open your mouth and shut your eyes, and to swallow what is given to you. Surely classical literature would be more generally diffused if it were carried about from town to town by itinerant lecturers, who would save all trouble of dictionary or grammar, all laborious exercise of judgment, or painful process of investigation. But Latin and Greek are things of no use—we can neither eat them nor drink them, nor furnish our houses with them, they give us no assistance in the manufacture of broad cloth, and they neither decrease consumers, nor increase consumables.

ITINERANT ARTISTS.

ITINERANT ARTISTS.

IF the mountain will not come to Mahomet, then Mahomet must go to the mountain; in like manner if the people in the country will not go to London to have their portraits taken, the artists from London must go into the country to take portraits. People, especially in country towns, may live on from year to year following their business with exquisite punctuality, and eating their meals with orthodox regularity, without being at all aware of their many wants; but people in London who walk in the streets, are reminded of their many necessities by the shop-windows, which contain every thing that every body wants, and a great deal more. There are

many things which one does not think of in the country, till they are absolutely brought to our very doors, or actually thrust before our noses. I can recollect the time when nobody in Blunderton cared about the fine arts: there were, it is true, a few paintings in one or two houses, and there were some family pictures, but they were very old, and the dresses were of such antique fashion, that portrait-painting seemed to be altogether a thing of a by-gone age. Suddenly, however, and to the surprise of all, a new era commenced in Blunderton. There appeared an advertisement in the Blunderton Chronicle, announcing that Mr. Smouch, portrait painter from London, had taken lodgings for a few weeks at the house of Mr. Dabble in the market-place. This announcement excited but little sensation; one half of the town scarcely knew what a portrait-painter was, and the other half could not imagine what he should come to Blunderton for. All the symptoms of the existence of Mr. Smouch at first, were a few paintings and

miniatures in Mr. Dabble's shopwindow; but as nobody knew the originals, nobody cared about the likenesses. Mr. Smouch himself was visible, —at least there was a person to be seen lounging in Mr. Dabble's shop, and strutting about the market-place, whom we took to be the gentleman in question, and we were right as it proved. He was dressed in a very fashionable style, and had about him an air that evidently showed London breeding. He had a silver-mounted eye-glass suspended round his neck by a black riband, and it would be incorrect to say, that the glass was always at his eye, for his nose was as frequently occupied by taking snuff, as his eye was in looking through the glass. For some days we stared at him as a stranger, but not for a moment did we reverence him as a genius, till one day, when every eye that entered the market-place was attracted to the shop-window of Mr. Dabble, by a picture as large as life, of Mr. Pipes the schoolmaster. There was no mistaking the thing — there was the unforgettable aquiline

nose, there was the straight thin grey hair, there were the broad flat staring eyes—the perked-up mouth, and the diminutive little chin: there were the high shoulders and the old rusty black coat, and the dirty, ill-tied neckcloth that looked like a rope twisted round his neck. In a word, there was the man himself, and so complete was the representation, that it was next to impossible to say which was the original, and which was the likeness. When you saw the picture in the window, you thought it was Mr. Pipes in the shop—when you saw Mr. Pipes in the street you thought it was the picture walking. Never since Blunderton became a town, was there ever such a crowd round a shop window, as was every day and almost every hour in the day, seen at the window of Mr. Dabble's shop. Men, women, and children, of every age and degree, were all attracted to this one focus. If you went out to a party, the first question asked was, "Have you seen the likeness of Mr. Pipes?"

Mr. Smouch was a lucky man when his eye was first attracted by the marked physiognomy of Mr. Pipes. The artist knew by his look, and judged by his talk, that he must be a public character in Blunderton, a man whom every body must know, and seeing how marked his features were, and how next to impossible it was to aim at a likeness and miss it, he besought Mr. Pipes to favour him with a few sittings, and with leave to exhibit the portrait. The schoolmaster had no objection to the arrangement, and the painting was exhibited accordingly. Thereupon Mr. Smouch became all the rage at Blunderton, his painting room was the grand lounge of the town; there might be found all the wits and wise-aces of the parish, suddenly exalted to the rank and dignity of critics. Mr. Smouch was a very communicative gentleman, and was well pleased to talk learnedly about his art, in the hearing of those whom he supposed to be ignorant, but by the help of a few cant phrases and technical terms their ignorance was presently dispersed,

and they became as knowing as the artist himself, or at all events able to converse with him in his own language. Mr. Smouch understood his business well, and knew that flattery was no small part of it—not merely the flattery of the canvas and brush, but the flattery of the tongue also. It is many years ago since he was at Blunderton, but I recollect as well as if it were but yesterday, the dexterity with which he contrived to compliment all who came within his reach. Such a very polite man had not been seen at Blunderton for many a year. Every body was delighted with him, and thought that because he flattered well, he was the best painter in the world. His courtesy was a recommendation to his art. He was not only an artist, but a man of genius and universal science; but if there was one science which he cultivated with greater diligence and devotion than another, it was the science of craniology. Not a young gentleman, at all susceptible of gullibility, came within his reach, but he was sure to find in his

skull some very extraordinary intellectual development. In a small town like Blunderton, where every body knows every body, it was easy enough for so sharp, inquisitive, and penetrating a genius as Mr. Smouch to obtain a pretty general insight into the more obvious characteristics of the loungers who frequented his painting room, and therefore he was able at times to astonish them by finding out in the construction of their skulls, decided manifestations of this, that, or the other propensity. And when he had gained their confidence by a display of his sagacity, he could easily administer to their vanity by finding out some highly gratifying intellectual trait. The wise-acres of country towns generally keep themselves and one another in countenance as to the matter of wisdom, and perhaps there are few exhibitions more truly entertaining than a knot of provincial conjurors blurting out their crude theories on matters which not one of them understands, and thinking, that because they are talking above their

own capacity, they are superior to all the rest of the world in matters of intellect. Such talk as this, Mr. Smouch very much encouraged, countenanced, and patronised in his painting room. He even went so far as almost to persuade some of these profound simpletons to attempt the formation of a philosophical society in Blunderton.

At this time mechanics' institutes had not been thought of, but the very individuals who at this period had been upon the very brink of perpetrating the absurdity of a philosophical society, did, a few years after, form themselves and others into a mechanics' institute. Mr. Smouch was certainly a bit of a humourist, though he carried it off with a very grave face; the Blunderton wise-aces must have afforded him infinite amusement. I remember one young gentleman in particular, an attorney, who had just begun to practise for himself, and who had, once or twice, had the pleasure of hearing his own voice at the Blunderton Quarter-Sessions; he had been quite

amazed at his own eloquence, and others, I believe, had been as much amused at it; he had gesticulated with all the energy of Punch at a fair, and had committed some half-dozen tropes and metaphors in the prosecution or defence of a poor half-witted stable boy, accused of stealing a truss of hay and a quartern of horse beans. This gentleman was asked by Mr. Smouch if he had ever seen a cast of the head of Cicero, "For," said the artist, "I have one at home, and the shape of the head exactly resembles that of yours." For so sweet and welcome a compliment as this, the attorney could do no less than sit for his portrait. While the work was proceeding the artist discovered still more and more intellectual peculiarities in the craniological developments, and the physiognomical indications of his sitter. Mr. Smouch could easily enough discern his subject's vanity, and shrewdly enough guessed that if he could throw a pretty full supply of the look of conceit into the picture, he should give a suffi-

cient mark of likeness, whereby the portrait might be recognised. The work was finished, and permission was graciously given to the artist to exhibit it in the window, together with the portraiture of Mr. Pipes. There could be no mistake, every one immediately knew the perked-up look of the conceited attorney, and pronounced the work to be a most admirable likeness. The sitter, during the time the picture was in hand, endeavoured, of course, to look as wise as he possibly could, so that he exaggerated, and almost caricatured himself, and the artist rather strengthened, than softened the expression. Mr. Smouch's sitters increased, and so did his fame, and so did his profits. But all human things are subject to decay, and so did it happen to the reputation of the itinerant artist. He knew what would be the case, for the same thing had occurred in other towns, therefore he began as many portraits as he could, and I must say that the people of Blunderton were eager enough to flock to him, so

that he had nearly a dozen subjects in hand at one time : and as soon as he saw that he was not likely to obtain any more, he gave out that he must positively leave Blunderton as soon as he had finished what he had in hand, and that it was absolutely impossible to undertake any more ; he was very sorry to be forced to leave a place to which he had become so much attached, and for the inhabitants of which he entertained so great an esteem ; but he had already stayed in the town a much longer time than he had intended ; and that even now, his other engagements had been considerably interfered with, by means of the stay which he had already made. The fact is, that the ingenious and talented Mr. Smouch, who, by the way, was the subject of much laudatory criticism in the Blunderton Chronicle, was indeed rather a caricaturist than a portrait painter ; he could, it is true, catch something of a likeness, so that if he had taken two portraits of two different persons, you might, perhaps, discern which was which ; but unless there were

some striking feature, or some remarkable expression which would bear exaggeration, he was by no means successful in the matter of likeness, and if the picture was not like the person for whom it was done, it was generally like nothing at all; for Mr. Smouch, notwithstanding all the laudatory criticism of the *Blunderton Chronicle*, was very little of an artist. Knowing this, therefore, it was his general practice when he was about to establish himself for a few months in a town to select from among its loungers or most gullible people, some one individual of remarkably peculiar physiognomy or expression, and to take his portrait, gratuitously, if necessary, and to exhibit the same in some shop window to the gaze and admiration of the town. This plan invariably succeeded; for in a country town not one in a hundred knows good painting from bad, but there is not one in a thousand who cannot recognise a likeness of some queer but well-known face.

I do not know how many portraits were

painted in Blunderton by Mr. Smouch, but I have a general, though somewhat indistinct recollection, that at the time you could scarcely enter the house of a person in comfortable circumstances in the town, without seeing a specimen of this gentleman's skill. But very soon after his departure, if not before, it was discovered, that however happy he might have been in one or two instances, he was far from being in general a good portrait painter. People looked at their pictures every day, and every day they liked them less and less. There was such a sameness in the style of Mr. Smouch's painting, such a monotony of expression in every picture, such an inveterate uniformity in the frames,—he always supplied the frames himself, that the portraits of the worthy people of Blunderton seemed to be almost all alike. The sitters now woke from their dream of admiration and delusion, and they found out that the marvellous, and at first imposing likeness of Mr. Pipes was after all but a miserable daub, and that the resemblance to

the original was entirely owing to the man's marked and singular physiognomy, which it was impossible to miss.

Mr. Smouch having made a tolerable clearance at Blunderton, and having painted almost every paintable face in the town, seemed to have made the place pretty nearly proof against itinerant artists. In a very few years after, however, there came another, not indeed exactly in the same line as Mr. Smouch, nor was he altogether a person of the same manners and demeanour. He was a tall pale-faced man, somewhat stooping in his gait, and very mild in his address; his ambition was not so great as to aspire to canvas and oil colours, he merely took miniatures or smallish portraits in water colours, or with pencil only, if required. Then there was also this recommendation that he did not require many sittings, and his charges were very reasonable. He would let you have a likeness framed and glazed for less money than Mr. Smouch charged for one of his frames. This

was certainly very tempting, for thereby many small shopkeepers, and divers other persons in the humbler walks of life were enabled to have delineations of themselves, and even of their little boys and girls too, at infinitely less expense than any one portrait executed by Mr. Smouch would have cost. The new artist, therefore, had abundance of business, and was not less proud than Mr. Smouch had been to exhibit in the shop window specimens of his handy-work. But this very cheap and expeditious artist was cut short in the midst of his career, and had the bread taken out of his mouth by the intrusion of one still more cheap and still more expeditious performer, who, by means of a machine, would give you a most absolutely unexceptionable likeness in the short space of two minutes, and at the low price of one shilling. The terms were irresistible, and they operated like a poll-tax in the town, bringing almost every individual in Blunderton under contribution. And now was the town supplied with likenesses which one should

have thought would have lasted for an age. To such an extent had the profile system reached in the town of Blunderton, that there was scarcely a dwelling in the whole place, however humble, which was not decorated with a group of black profiles. The oil paintings of Mr. Smouch gradually crept into oblivion. When parlours were new painted or papered, the old portraits were not hung up again in the places which they once had occupied; they were banished into passages or staircases, or hung up in bed-chambers, or poked up into lumber rooms. The likenesses had lost all likeness, the originals had grown older, and did not like to be reminded of the lapse of time; some of the sitters were gathered to their fathers, and the pictures were neglected and despised, for they reminded the owners more of Mr. Smouch, than of anything else. The truth however, is, that in consequence of the multiplication of likenesses, and the incessant display of whole hosts of profiles over cottage chimney-pieces, family

pictures began to be thought vulgar, especially since it became the general opinion, that a black profile drawn by the machinery gave a better notion of the individual, than one of Mr. Smouch's elaborate paintings, and furthermore, the colours of this gentleman's pictures grew old and faded before their time. Had I been asked at this period whether it were worth while for an artist of any pretensions to visit Blunderton, I should certainly, without the least hesitation, have said "no;" for the whole town seemed to be sick of paintings, and to be saturated with profiles. Moreover I should have added, that the times were very much altered since Mr. Smouch succeeded so well here, and that people had not now so much spare cash to spend on superfluities as they had in those days. I also should have said, as most certainly I thought, that the inhabitants of Blunderton had learned wisdom from the past, and that however promising an artist might appear, their recollection of their disappointment in the portraits of

Mr. Smouch would render them shy of sitting to another, however promising he might appear, or with whatever recommendations he might come. In addition to all this I might also have remarked that, as the town was already saturated with cheap likenesses, and as the facility of visiting the metropolis was of late years so much increased, those who might be desirous of having properly executed portraits would most likely not think much of a journey to London for that express purpose. Nevertheless and notwithstanding all these apparent obstacles and disadvantages, Blunderton has been visited by another artist, quite as great a man as Mr. Smouch, and somewhat greater.

To what pitch of perfection in the fine arts, or to what degree of extravagance we shall arrive in Blunderton, it is impossible to say. We used to think Mr. Smouch high, whose terms were ten guineas, and who never took less than five, but of late years we have had a visit from an artist, whose terms were fifteen guineas, and

who would not take a "farden" less. Mr. Grand was totally indifferent whether he had sitters or not. In fact he had been so much engaged in London, and had been so much sought after by the nobility, who would not let him have a moment's rest, that he was glad to get down into the country for a little while just to take breath. As, however, he was fond of his art, and as he could paint at his leisure in the country, he had no very particular objection, just by way of keeping his hand in, to take a few portraits of some of the principal people in Blunderton, and he had fixed his terms so low as fifteen guineas, in order to accommodate himself to the place. He gave us to understand that in London he never painted a portrait for less than sixty guineas, and added forty more for a coronet. And to show that he was not a vain and empty boaster, but that he really did paint nobility, he stuck up in Mr. Dabble's shop-window a portrait in a handsome frame, having a coronet at the top. In front of the

picture lay a card, "Mr. Grand, Portrait Painter." This was all the advertisement that Mr. Grand condescended to give of himself; the particulars above stated, were gathered from his conversation. Poor old Mr. Pipes, who was somewhat advanced in life, being nearly twenty years older than he was when Mr. Smouch flourished in Blunderton, recollecting the celebrity which he had acquired by the gratuitous portrait which that artist had painted of him, thought that perhaps Mr. Grand would have equal pleasure in displaying his skill on the same marked features, especially as age had made those features still more marked. But Mr. Grand was too great a man to have recourse to such mode of advertising. Mr. Pipes, therefore, set forth the magnificence of Mr. Grand, who never condescended to do nothing for nothing. Mr. Grand was two or three weeks in Blunderton without a sitter, and people began to say, that his terms were too high, and that his style of demeanour was not likely to obtain him

much employment. Just at this time Mr. Prigg the dancing master was in the very zenith of his glory—his amateur concerts were well attended, and he had a tolerably fair share of business in the way of teaching. Mr. Prigg had often seen his face in the glass, and liked the look of it very much, and was of opinion that it would look quite as well upon canvas. Hearing it also said, that Mr. Grand's terms were rather too high, the dancing master thought that it would reflect everlasting disgrace on the town of Blunderton, if so distinguished an artist as Mr. Grand should be suffered to leave the place without painting a single portrait, merely because his terms were high. Mr. Prigg indeed was decidedly of opinion, that his terms were by no means high, when compared with his reputation and skill. Who could expect that an artist who had painted nobility would condescend to delineate plebeians for less than fifteen guineas! Now when Mr. Prigg presented himself to Mr. Grand, Mr. Grand could hardly believe that

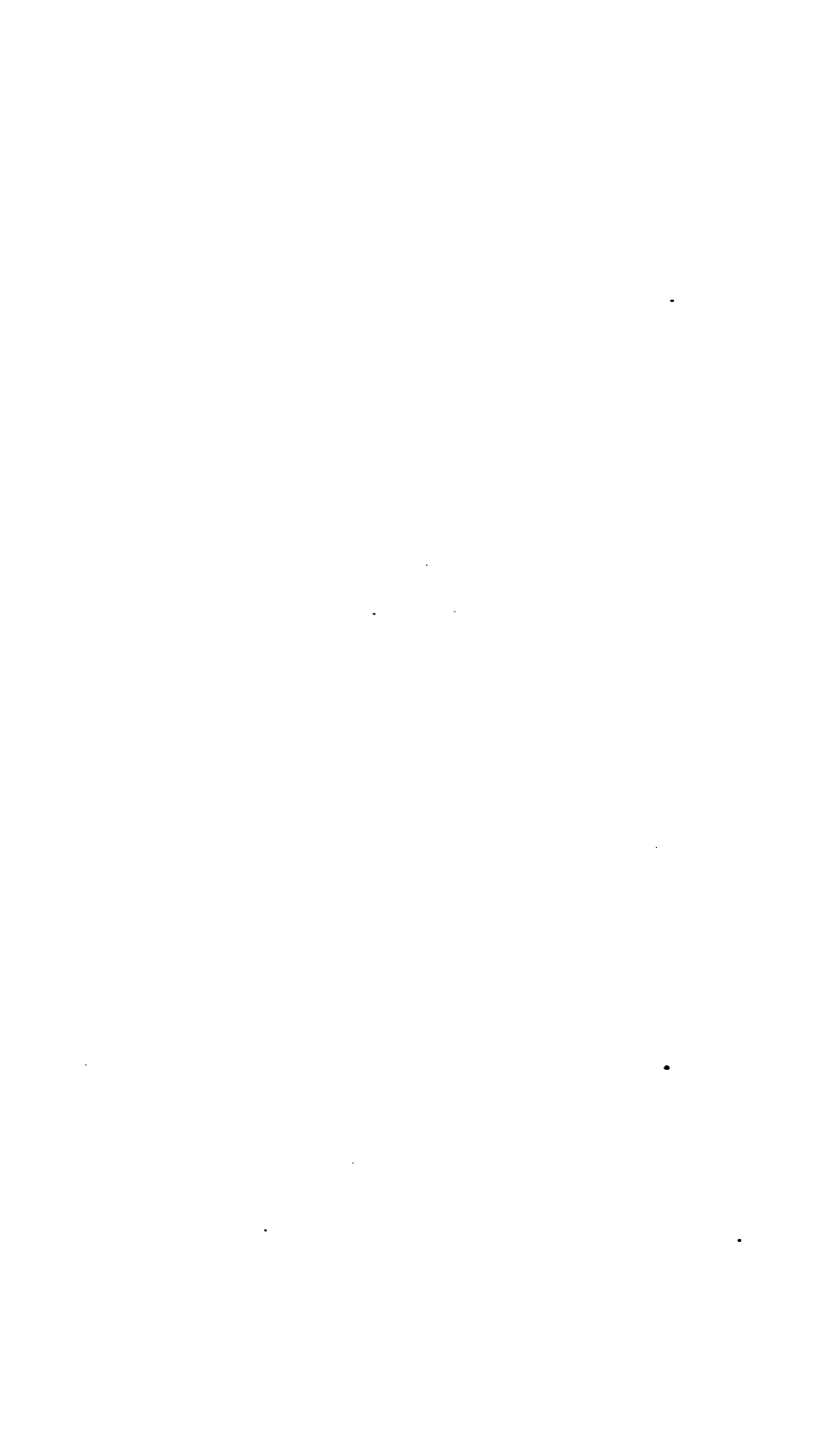
Mr. Prigg was not of noble birth, for there was such a striking dignity of manner and gracefulness of carriage about the professor of dancing, that the professor of painting was charmed. Down sat the professor of painting, and down sat the professor of dancing, both of them swelling with a sense of their own grandeur, like a pair of rival frogs trying which would be the first to burst itself. The professor of dancing looked lightning and talked thunder. Both sitter and painter were aware of the importance of their respective situations, and both seemed disposed to make the most of themselves. It was a peculiarity in Mr. Grand's style of portrait painting, that he generally threw into every countenance that was at all susceptible of such embellishment, a kind of knowing, pert, coxcombical air, which, in his estimation, gave a liveliness and speaking air to the portrait. For this species of expression, the countenance of Mr. Prigg was most especially adapted. From his very infancy he had been accustomed to cultivate that kind of air,

which seems to say, "stand by, clear the way." In order to give an additional effect to the portrait, the artist proposed, and the sitter fell in with the proposal, to have his fine blue cloak, with its crimson lining and gilt clasps, introduced into the picture. Thus Mr. Prigg looked quite himself—nay more than himself, he was exaggerated and intensified tenfold; he was more than Prigg, he was Priggissimus.

The picture was not stuck up in Mr. Dabble's shop-window, but it was, after having been fixed in a gilt frame of greater depth and splendour than had ever before been seen in Blunderton, hung up in Mr. Prigg's concert room, whereby it soon became the talk of the town. Nay, indeed, at one time it so attracted the attention of the hearers of Mr. Prigg's concerts, that he was forced to have a curtain hung over it during the time of performance. This picture answered very well; the grandees at Blunderton would not be outdone by a dancing master, and forthwith Mr. Grand's painting room was thronged; that

is, as much as a room in a country town can be thronged. The poor old stupid caricatures of Mr. Smouch, as they were now contemptuously called, were utterly discarded, and universally execrated; and the good people of Blunderton, instead of learning wisdom by their past experience, and refusing to be gulled and caught a second time by the same bait, fell all the more eagerly into the trap in consequence of having been taken in before. They made comparisons between Mr. Smouch and Mr. Grand, not at all in favour of the former, forgetting that they were once as delighted with Mr. Smouch, as they were now with Mr. Grand. But every dog has his day.

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY.



THE PUBLIC LIBRARY.

INTELLECT had scarcely begun its march, when it was resolved unanimously that Blunderton ought to have its public library and reading room. There had been indeed, time out of mind, a circulating library at Mr. Dabble's in the market place, but that was merely for novels, and Mr. Dabble's novels were very old ones, and they had become so dirty by constant use, that they stuck together in sets like old cribbage cards. Mr. Dabble, in the selection of his library, studied economy rather than novelty; he did not see what business people had to read new books till they had first read all the old ones; for, said he, an old book is new to one that has

not read it. Mr. Dabble is now an elderly man, but when he was younger, he was always remarkable for a neat and quiet style of behaviour. He had, indeed, a sort of blindness, but it was gentle withal: he was never rude to his customers, and if he did now and then think that in the matter of fancy reading they were rather whimsical and capricious, and did not exactly know their own minds, he had such a quaint and pleasant way of telling them of it, that he never gave them serious offence. I remember the time when the Waverley novels were in their first popularity, and there were six young ladies and seven young gentlemen, to say nothing of I know not how many adults, all dying to read the Antiquary. Poor Mr. Dabble was tormented from morning till night by inquiries after the book, for one copy was certainly not sufficient to supply the population of Blunderton. He seemed to think that every body that came into his shop came for the Antiquary; and more than once when he has been at dinner in the little

back parlour behind the shop, and a customer has come in, he has called out "the Antiquary is not at home." The Antiquary was as great a torment to him as Monsieur Tonson was to the poor persecuted Frenchman. Happily, however, he possessed a constitutional placidity that enabled him to bear up under the trial. "I cannot think," he used to say, "what the people can mean by being so violently anxious to read one particular book, when I have lots of books in my library that they have never read, or at least if they have they have forgotten them by this time, and might read them over again as new ones."

Well then, Mr. Dabble's circulating library did well enough for our ancestors, but it would not do for us. It became absolutely necessary that we should have something on a grander and more intellectual scale. Decidedly the cleverest man in Blunderton was Antrobus Potts, a small scrivener, and, I may say, still is, only, as I am speaking of past events, I use the past tense. Mr. Potts was not only a clever

man, but was also a man of great activity, and very forward in most matters which regard the interest or management of the town at large. The opinion of this gentleman was always quoted in matters on which he might be pleased to give an opinion, and few, indeed, were those topics on which he had nothing to say. For a long time it was the talk of Blunderton, that Mr. Potts was of opinion that it was quite a disgrace to so opulent and intellectual a town as Blunderton that it should not have a public library, or some literary or scientific institution, for Loppington, a rival town, though not boasting so large a population, had been some time in possession of a thing of that kind.

The thought that Loppington should outdo Blunderton was not to be borne—the thing was talked about, and talked about, and talked about. The columns, also, of the Blunderton Chronicle, were frequently graced with epistolary communications from literary young ladies and gentlemen, praying and beseeching

the more influential and leading persons in the town to devise some plan for removing the reproach of Blunderton by the formation of a literary establishment. This importunity could not be long resisted: a meeting was accordingly called of all the wise men of Blunderton, at the head of whom was Mr. Antrobus Potts. It is needless to say that the meeting came to an unanimous resolution to form a literary establishment suitable to the dignity and importance of the town, and calculated to meet the necessities of the times. But there presently sprung up a difficulty as to the name whereby the institution should be designated. Some thought that the name of Public Library was not sufficiently dignified, and were for having the affair designated The Blunderton Institute. Others preferred calling it the Athenæum, others the Lyceum, others the Portico. Unfortunately, however, it did not appear that funds were forthcoming to construct a building which would not make these swelling names ridiculous. In a word, when the

probable income came to be soberly estimated, taking the contributions as high as possible, and calculating the number of subscribers as great as could be, it was found that, so far from having means to erect a building, they would have barely enough to hire a room and to purchase a circulating library. Furthermore, there sprung up another difficulty, and that was how to keep the affair properly select. Selectness is a great point at Blunderton; and where, indeed, is it not so? It was of course quite impossible that any one not keeping a shop should sit down in the same room, read the same periodicals, and have his name in the same list with a shopkeeper, or a tradesman; and it was also next to impossible for the town of Blunderton to raise enough for the purpose of their meditated institution without the assistance of some who kept shops. This matter of course was discussed with great delicacy, so as not to cause those who kept shops to take umbrage or to fly off in a tangent. In the matter of the library there was no great

difficulty. Patricians and plebeians had hitherto subscribed to Mr. Dabble's library, and had read the same books. But for patricians and plebeians to sit and lounge and gossip in the same room, poring over reviews, or spelling over newspapers, would be a species of abomination never heard of in Blunderton or Loppington, or any of the regions round about.

Loppington was not so much of a town of business as Blunderton, so that the first-named place could afford to cut shopkeepers. So at length the discussion and deliberation on this important matter terminated in the establishment of nothing but a public library. Mr. Dabble was at first rather annoyed at the prospect of this new establishment. "I can't think," said he, "what these people would have. They say that my books are not worth reading, and I wonder how they can tell that, for I am very sure they have never read half of them, and it is far beyond my poor judgment to ascertain how it

can be possible for any one to know that a book is a bad one without reading it."

Mr. Dabble, however, was soon consoled, by being informed that, as principal bookseller in the town, he should have the honour of supplying the new Library. He offered to sell them his own circulating library to begin with; but that rude man, Antrobus Potts, actually laughed in his face at the very mention of the matter. "You may laugh as much as you please," said Mr. Dabble, with great composure, "but my books have been read by wiser and better men than you." This was rather rude to tell Mr. Potts to his face, that there had ever been a better or wiser man than he; but the fact is that Mr. Dabble had a great regard for the books of his old circulating library; he loved their greasy covers, and their old brown frowsy leather backs—he had an affection for their very infirmities—for their poor old dogs' ears—for their loose leaves, here and there stuck in with pins black

with age—he liked to see the marginal annotations—the pungent criticisms—the sentimental notes of admiration, sometimes expressed in modest pencil marks, and in other cases staring him in the face in all the black rudeness of downright ink,—such as “how fine!” “What a beautiful description of morning!” “Ah, this is love, indeed!” “What a wicked wretch is this Rinaldo!” These and many other such like annotations charmed the old gentleman, and these were all that he read of his own books; and by these remarks he knew that his books had been read, and that they had interested and entertained their readers. When he was told by Mr. Potts that the Public Library was to be furnished with something superior to novels, he said, “Ah! very likely, Mr. Potts, very likely; the world has become mighty wise of late days; but take my word for it, and I know something about books, if you want to have your books read, you must furnish your shelves with novels; but if you wish to keep your books clean, you

may fill your library with philosophy and metaphysics. I have kept shop for more than thirty years, and I was never but once asked for a book of philosophy, and that was by a young gentleman about twenty years of age, and he kept it about a month, and there it stands now, covered with dust on the outside, and clean as a penny within; it has not been out since, and is not cut open; you may have it for half price."

A Public Library, however, was established, and though the contributors thereunto could not afford to build an Athenæum or a Portico, yet they managed to take the lease of a small house, which had been recently occupied by a haberdasher, and by throwing the shop and parlour all into one, a sort of a kind of a little long room was made, which, though not very large, was quite large enough to contain all the books that they had to put into it, or indeed that they were likely to have for some years to come. The upper part of the house served as the dwelling

of the librarian. This was all very pleasant and very agreeable. Mr. Antrobus Potts rubbed his hands and was quite in ecstasies—he walked up and down the library surveying the shelves and taking snuff. Mr. Antrobus Potts was elected president for the first year: not that he was the greatest man in the town, but he was the busiest, and a parched pea that jumps about in a shovel makes more noise than a cannon ball that lies still upon the ground. Mr. Antrobus Potts had under him a committee of management, who were to act as a kind of privy council, aiding his wisdom by their advice, and countenancing his acts by their authority. It was by the almost unassisted wisdom of Mr. Antrobus Potts that the Laws and Regulations of the Blunderton Public Library were drawn up. These laws were printed and hung up in the room, and the name of Antrobus Potts was conspicuous as president. The appointment of Librarian was a matter of some difficulty. There were many candidates for the situation, it being considered by most as a

very easy place, and almost a sinecure. But the funds would not allow a salary that would come near to a maintenance, therefore it was found necessary to obtain as cheap a librarian as possible: so they appointed to the place a middle-aged sempstress, to whom a rent-free dwelling and a few shillings a week were an object; and in order to give the poor woman time to do her needle-work, attendance to the business of the library was only required a few hours in the day, and but three days in the week. In the eyes of the sempstress librarian, Mr. Antrobus Potts was a great man. With folded arms and down-cast eye did she listen to the various injunctions and admonitions which he in his wisdom gave her for the management of the library.

It was at one time proposed, and the proposal was seriously weighed and considered, that no novels should be admitted into the library. But the proposal was rejected—there were no ladies in the committee, but the gentlemen said that the ladies were decidedly against the exclusion

of novels. I have no doubt that had the committee consisted of ladies, they would have come to the same conclusion, and they would have thrown on the gentlemen the odium of the wish to have novels introduced. Such was the formation and establishment of the Blunderton Public Library. It has now been in existence many years, during which time it has had many difficulties to contend with, all of which Mr. Dabble affects to commiserate, but none of which he really pities. For the few first years a serious lack of funds obstructed the full accomplishment of their schemes. They were determined to be exceedingly select, so they resolved after their first establishment, that no subscriber to the Blunderton Public Library should be admitted but by ballot. Not a word had been said about excluding shopkeepers, but shopkeepers were shy of the ballot. Out of the subscriptions there were not only books to be bought, but there was a lawyer's bill to be paid for drawing the lease; there was a carpenter's

bill to be paid for fitting up the shelves ; there were bills also from plasterers, bricklayers, plumbers, glaziers, painters, and many other little matters to be settled before a single book could be bought : indeed it may be said that had it not been for the generosity of a few opulent individuals, the Blunderton Public Library would be so marvellously select as to have very few subscribers and no books. It was not only money that these opulent and generous benefactors gave, they also gave books—not indeed ephemeral books of light reading, which last but for a season and then are heard of no more, but solid, substantial and durable works, which form an essential part of every well furnished library—such as the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, *Johnson's Dictionary*, *Blackstone's Commentaries*, *Locke's works*, and very many others of the same cast and value. Now when it is considered that till this time no other library accessible to the public at Blunderton, save that of Mr. Dabble, which has already been described, it may readily

be supposed, that the subscribers to the Public Library felt themselves somewhat advanced in intellectual importance, as being subscribers to a library which contained quartos and folios.

Still, however, a little inconvenience was for some time felt for want of new books—books that people must read because they are talked about. The *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and Johnson's *Dictionary*, are very useful books, but it is not every body that wants to read them. It is I believe a fact, for Mr. Dabble says so, and I have no reason to doubt his word, that many subscribers to the Public Library, did at first, and some even do still, come to his library for the light reading which they cannot find in such great abundance at the more learned institution. For a long time indeed after the formation of the public library, although novels were not absolutely prohibited, yet very few were admitted, and that not so much from want of taste as from want of funds; for had they purchased many novels, they would not have

had the means of purchasing any other books at all, and that would have brought great disgrace upon them, as they thought.

When the Library had been established some little time, so that the gloss of its novelty was somewhat worn off, there arose among the subscribers, or some of them, a spirit of murmuring and discontent; they complained that they could get no books, though there were hundreds in the library which they had never read, but they all wanted to read the same book at the same time. A new book in the Blunderton Library was something like a new plaything in a nursery with a dozen children, who, on the instant, throw away their old ones, and are ready to tear the new one in pieces.

The librarian, poor woman, endeavoured, according to the best of her poor abilities and judgment to give satisfaction, and to preserve peace; but, because she could not let a dozen persons have the same book at the same time, she had to undergo many reproaches, and to hear many

awful threats of unspeakable vengeance, from the impatient *literati* of Blunderton. Many a time, in sad despair, has she contemplated seriously to resign her situation, although in her such a step would be next of kin to suicide. She is a meek, quiet, and well-meaning woman,—she would not hurt a mouse, and would as soon think of flying to the moon on a broomstick as of neglecting any of her high and important duties, as librarian of the Blunderton public library. She is also a very grateful woman, and on the principle of gratitude wishes to give satisfaction to all her patrons and patronesses ; for by their patronage, not only is she in possession of a house rent free, an income of three shillings a-week, a chaldron of coals *per annum*, but, of late years, her name has been immortalised in the Blunderton Pocket Book, for among the various institutions of the town is now mentioned—“The Public Library. President, Antrobus Potts, Esq. ; librarian, Mrs. Bridget Flack.” But Mrs. Flack cannot do impossibilities, and it is this that vexes

her. And truly it is very painful to an ingenuous mind, to have to undergo severe and bitter rebukes, being, at the same time, conscious that they are undeserved. Not only does she suffer unjust reproof, but she must bear it with unrepining meekness and unanswering resignation; if Mrs. Tims scold Mrs. Flack because Mrs. Dobbs has not yet done reading the second volume of Eugene Aram, Mrs. Flack must not go for to think for to dare for to presume to intimate that the fault belongs to Mrs. Dobbs, but poor Mrs. Flack must bear the blame of another's transgression. This is very hard, and I hope that such injustice is unknown beyond the town of Blunderton.

But not only do the subscribers to the library complain, that they can never get a book, they also speak very disrespectfully of the committee, saying, that these gentlemen assemble together and order just what books they like; which, of course, is very absurd on the part of the committee, who ought, by no means, to assemble

together and to order what books they like, but ought, undoubtedly, to keep apart, and order what books they do not like. It is very odd, indeed, that persons in authority should like to use their authority according to their own judgment and discretion. This absurdity is most likely confined to the town of Blunderton, and it is recorded here for the sake of its singularity.

Not many years ago, the subscribers to the library finding that their funds were not ample enough to order so many books as they wished, they caused it to be understood throughout the town, that though the form of ballot was used in admitting subscribers, yet there was no disposition on the part of the existing proprietors to exclude any respectable individual, who was disposed to join them. The hint was taken, and several new subscribers accordingly were added to the establishment. Thereupon ability was given to purchase more books, but then, unfortunately, the number of readers was increased, in the same ratio as the number of

books, and poor Mrs. Flack's persecutors increased at the same time. At all these various troubles Mr. Dabble chuckled heartily in the silence and solitude of his own thoughts; and his darling old library of greasy romances became more in vogue than ever, for it was a fashion in Blunderton to read, and a great number of those in humble life, who imitated their superiors in the fashion of reading, cared not what books they had, provided they had something to read.

By dint of increasing the number of subscribers, and by the gradual accumulation of several years, the public library, of course, grew considerably larger than it had been in its early days. But still the complaint continues in all its force, if not with increased intensity, that it is impossible to get a book. It is a sad thing, indeed, to starve in the midst of plenty, but so, indeed, it happens, that individuals, day after day, come into this public library, where they are surrounded by books on all sides, and yet they

lament, almost with tears, that they can get nothing to read. In vain does the civil and courteous Mrs. Flack offer to them volume after volume, or enumerate an infinite variety of instructive and entertaining works, they refuse to be comforted, and because they cannot have the one on which they have set their hearts, they will not have any one at all. I suppose from this kind of pique, which is by no means peculiar to Blunderton, arises the term *lovers* of literature; for as the lover, when disappointed of the object of his affections, is heedless of all the rest of the sex, so the lover of literature, when he cannot have his favourite book to read, will have none at all,—the library is a blank to one as the world is to the other. So much for our Blunderton Public Library.

GENTILITY.

GENTILITY.

OUR Provincial Sketches would be incomplete without a few words on the subject of gentility. Without gentility we are nothing. We know very well, at Blunderton, that Loppington is considered the genteeler town of the two, but it does not follow that we have no gentility at all at Blunderton; we have, indeed, our share, but if we do happen to possess a little less of the article than they of Loppington, we are the more chary of the little that we do possess. At Blunderton we are genteel in all things, as far as we know how to be so. Mrs. Frumpshaw's school is very genteel, and that, I believe, is its principal recom-

mendation; Mrs. Frumpshaw herself is a large, coarse-looking, corpulent, personage, not over accurate in her conversational grammar; she writes a tolerably fairish hand, but she does not shine in spelling; her style of dress is rather tawdry than neat; her voice is loud and her manners rough; but, notwithstanding all this,—or it may be in consequence of all this, I really cannot say,—her school is very genteel—there are other schools in the town, but there are none that can vie with Mrs. Frumpshaw's in the article of gentility. This good lady is very particular as to the selectness of her pupils, and very seldom admits the daughter of a shopkeeper into her establishment, unless the young lady happen to have genteel connections.

Generally speaking, we are perfectly aware at Blunderton of the enormity of shopkeeping, but in consequence of divers intermarriages several very genteel people are connected with shopkeepers, whose acquaintance they cannot altogether conveniently cut, and that, not merely

for decency's sake, but from prudential considerations. Some of our Blunderton shopkeepers are very opulent folk, and some of our Blunderton gentry are not very opulent folk, therefore, we are occasionally placed under a necessity of voting some shopkeepers genteel. The dictators of gentility at Blunderton are the professional part of the community, apothecaries, attorneys, and the clergy, almost all of whom, at the present time, happen, I believe, to be, more or less, connected with persons engaged in business. Even Mr. Antrobus Potts, who is becoming greater and greater every day in his own estimation, is but the son of a shopkeeper, and, indeed, of rather a small shopkeeper, who was never esteemed mightily genteel; but Mr. Potts the elder is now no more, his shop is in other hands, and Antrobus Potts remembers it no more. Antrobus, however, is condescending, even to shopkeepers, because they supply him with business, and it is by no means ungentle in Blunderton to be civil to those by whom any-

thing is to be gained. In our assemblies, and at our news-room, there is, of course, no admittance granted to shopkeepers, and, I believe, that the shopkeepers themselves are perfectly aware of the impossibility, and are, accordingly, resigned to their fate ; they can, however, enjoy the satisfaction of being genteel, though not admissible to the Blunderton assemblies.

Not only are there genteel persons in Blunderton, as contradistinguished from ungenteel, but there are also genteel places. We have, in the immediate vicinity of the town, two promenades, the one is a park, belonging to a venerable old mansion, which is sometimes let to one family and sometimes to another, and this park is open to the public for a certain period during the year, and a very pleasant place it is,—it is a nice, safe, quiet place, for nursemaids to take children to, and from several eminences therein most delightful views may be had of the country, in almost every direction, for miles and miles—the river is a particularly beautiful object seen

from the park ;—there is also another promenade, called the meadows—a low level tract of ground lying alongside the river, and, of course, except in very dry weather indeed, somewhat damp. Now such is the perversity of the taste of the good people of Blunderton, that for some fancy or other it seems generally understood that it is very genteel to walk in the meadows, but very ungenteel to walk in the park. If, indeed, you have a friend from a distance paying a visit at your house, one who has never been at Blunderton before, you may, without any violation of the eternal and unviolable laws of gentility, take your visiter once into the park, just by way of showing him or her the place, but it would be very ungenteel to promenade there habitually. In like manner, there are genteel and ungenteel parts of the town. Our market place, for instance, is somewhat on a slope, and one side is higher up than the other ; you may, if need be, pass along the upper side, but it would be very ungenteel to lounge there for half an hour, while it is the

height of gentility to saunter about on the lower side. There are also genteel and ungenteel cake-shops; a truly genteel Blundertonian would rather suffer the pains of hunger than eat at the wrong shop, where only the vulgar people go.

There are also genteel times as well as genteel places and persons. At certain times in the day it is very ungenteel to be seen in the streets of the town, a shopkeeper may be seen standing at his door with his apron round him, and yet, at the same time, peradventure, his wife would think it very ungenteel to be seen out of doors.

We have a theatre at Blunderton, a dark, damp, dismal, dingy place, which is occupied, for a few weeks in the course of the winter, by a set of strolling players, who come once a-year and do their best to amuse us, and we go to see their performance, for which, of course, they are duly grateful; but, though they perform every night, we do not go every night to see them; we con-

sider a few particular nights of performing to be particularly genteel. I do not know why it is, I only know that so it is. Let them act whatever they please, let them select the stupidest pieces, and perform them in the most execrably stupid style, and they have a considerable capacity this way it must be acknowledged, still nothing would keep us away on the genteel nights. On the other hand, let the performances be ever so attractive, and let the performers and the manager exert their utmost powers to please, on the ungenteel nights, it is impossible to get anybody there at all above the rank of a small shopkeeper, or small shopkeeper's journeyman: the manager gives away a great many tickets on the ungenteel nights, but they to whom he gives them scarcely thank him for them. I heard that the ostler at the King's Head had tickets given him for himself, his wife, and daughter, but he returned them, because they were only for the upper, and

not for the dress boxes; and yet, on the genteel nights, the same man will take his family into the gallery and pay for their admission. So much for gentility.

VILLAGE CHORISTERS.

VILLAGE CHORISTERS.

A PIG in a string is a troublesome article to manage, two pigs in a string are more troublesome still, to a degree, perhaps, in proportion to the squares of their distances—a ram in a halter is also proverbial for obstinacy,—mules are celebrated for their pertinacity, and donkeys for their stupidity; but all the pigs, rams, mules, and asses in the world, put together, would be more easily managed than a company of singers in a village church. About four miles from Loppington there is a village called Snatcham. The living is but small, and the rector resides and performs his duty without the aid of a curate. You cannot imagine a milder and more gentle

creature than this excellent clergyman. He is quite a picture, either for pen or pencil. He is not more than five feet four inches in height, somewhat stout, but not very robust; he is nearly seventy years of age—perhaps quite, by this time; his hair, what little is left of it, is as white as silver; his face is free from all wrinkles either of care or age; his voice is slender, but musical with meekness. The practical principle of his demeanour has always been—anything for a quiet life. He would not speak a harsh word, or think an unkind thought to or of any human being; but he is now and then tempted to think that when the apostle Paul recommended the Christians to live peaceably with all men, he put in the saving clause “if possible,” with particular reference to village choristers. Snatcham choir is said to be the best in the county; such, at least, is the opinion of the choristers themselves; and he must be a bold man who should say to the contrary. They are no doubt very sincere when they say that they never heard any better

than themselves ; for, to judge from their singing, you would not imagine that they had ever heard any one else. Snatcham church does not boast an organ, and it is well it does not, for if it did, the whole choir would insist upon playing on it all at once ; but instead of an organ it has a band of music, which has been gradually increasing for some years past. It commenced about thirty-five years ago, with a pitch-pipe, which was presently superseded by a flute. It was soon found, however, that the dulcet notes of a single flute were quite lost amid the chaos of sounds produced by the vocal efforts of the choir, so a second flute was added by way of reinforcement ; but all the flutes in the world would be no match for the double bass voice of Martin Grubb the Snatcham butcher, under whose burly weight and hurly-burly notes the whole music-gallery trembled and shook. To give pungency to the instrumental department, therefore, a hautboy was added ; but the vocalists felt it a point of honour to outscreech the instruments,

and the miscellaneous voice of James Gripe, the miller's son, who sang tenor, treble, or counter-tenor, just as it happened, was put into requisition for extra duty to match the hautboy. James Gripe could sing very loud; but the louder he sang, the more you heard that kind of noise that is produced by singing through a comb. It used to be said of him that he sang as if he had studied music in a mill during a high wind. To the two flutes and the hautboy were added two clarionets, because two of Gripe's younger brothers were growing up, and had a fancy for music. Young Grubb, the son of the butcher, began soon to exhibit musical talents, and accompanied his father at home on the violoncello, which instrument, with the leave of the rector, was added to the church band in a very short time,—a time too short, I believe, for the perfection of the performance.

The rector, dear good man, never refused his leave to anything, especially to what the singers asked; they might have had leave to introduce a

wagon and eight horses if they had asked—but still the rector did not like it; and every time he was called upon to christen a child for one of his parishioners, he trembled lest the young one should have a turn for music, and introduce into the gallery some new musical abomination. It was next discovered that only one bass to so many treble instruments was not fair play, so to the violoncello was added a bassoon, and to the bassoon a serpent. What next?—nothing more at present; but if the movement party retain its ascendancy, triangles and kettle-drums may be expected. The present state of Snatcham choir is as follows. In the first place there is Martin Grubb, the butcher, a stout robust man of about fifty years of age, having a round head and a red face, with strong, straight, thick brownish grey hair, combed over his forehead, and reaching to his very eyebrows. He is the oldest, the wealthiest, and the most influential man in the choir. He sings bass, and is said to be the life and soul of the party, though there are no great

symptoms of life and soul in his face, which is about as full of expression as a bullock's liver. Then there is young Martin Grubb, who is a bit of a dandy, with black curling hair, and whiskers of the same pattern, pale face, thin lips, long chin, and short nose; his instrument is the violoncello. James Gripe is leader of the treble voices, with occasional digressions, as above noticed. And, in addition to the two younger Gripes, Absalom and Peter, who play the two clarionets, there are Onesiphorus Bang, the shoemaker, who plays the first flute; Issachar Crack, a rival shoemaker, who plays the second flute; Cornelius Pike, the tobacco-pipe maker, who plays the bassoon; Alexander Rodolpho Crabbe, the baker, who plays the hautboy; Gregory Plush, the tailor, who plays the serpent, together with divers others, men, boys, and girls, who make up the whole band.

This renowned choir has for a long time considered itself the *ne plus ultra* of the musical profession, and consequently equal to the perform-

ance of any music that was ever composed. The old fashioned psalm tunes are therefore all banished from Snatcham church, to the great grief of the worthy rector, whose own voice is almost put out of tune by hearing Sternhold and Hopkins sung to the tunes of "Lovely nymph, assuage my anguish," and such like Vauxhall and Sadler's Wells music. The members of the choir too, like other political bodies, have not much peace within unless they have war without. If any attack be made upon their privileges they stick together like a swarm of bees; but at other times they are almost always at loggerheads one with another. Old Martin Grubb wields a precarious sceptre, for James Gripe is mightily tenacious of his rights, and resists, tooth and nail, the introduction or too frequent use of those tunes which superabound with bass solos. Grubb and Gripe, by way of an attempt at compromising the matter, have latterly been in the habit of taking it by turns to choose the tunes; and their alternate choice puts one very much in

mind of the fable of the fox and the stork, who invited one another to dinner, the fox preparing a flat dish, of which the stork could not avail himself, and the stork in return serving up dinner in a long-necked bottle, too narrow to admit the fox's head. When James Gripe chooses the tune, he flourishes away in tenor and treble solos, leaving the butcher as mute as a fish; but when the choice devolves on Martin Grubb, he pays off old scores by a selection of those compositions which most abound in bass solos. And in such cases it not unfrequently happens that Martin, in the delighted consciousness of a triumph over his tenor, treble and counter-tenor rival, growls and roars with such thundering exultation, that the gallery quivers beneath him, while his son saws away at his violoncello as though he would cut it in half from very ecstasy. Cornelius Pike and Gregory Plush also spend as much breath as they can spare, and perhaps a little more than they can spare conveniently, in filling the vast cavities of their respective serpent and bassoon.

All this disturbs and distresses the feelings of the worthy pastor, who thinks it possible, and feels it desirable, that public devotion should be conducted with a little less noise. It appears, indeed, and no doubt the choristers one and all think so, that Snatcham church and Sternhold and Hopkins's psalms were all made to show forth the marvellous talents of the Snatcham choristers. They think that all the people who attend there come merely for the music, and that the prayers and the sermon have no other use or object than just to afford the singers and other musicians time to take breath, and to give them an opportunity of looking over and arranging their books for the next outbreak of musical noise. So little attention do the Snatcham choristers pay to any other part of the service than that in which themselves are concerned, that during the whole course of the prayers, and in all the sermon time, they are whispering to one another, and conning over their music books, sometimes almost

audibly buzzing out some musical passage, which seems to require elucidation peradventure to some novice; and Master Grubb the younger is so delighted with his violoncello, that he keeps hugging the musical monster with as much fondness and grace as a bear hugs its cubs, and every now and then, in pleasing anticipation of some coming beauties, or in rapturous recollection of some by-gone graces, he tickles the sonorous strings with his clumsy fingers, bringing forth whispers of musical cadences loud enough to wake the drowsy and to disturb the attentive part of the congregation. And then the good rector casts up to the music-gallery a look, not of reproof, but of exposition, and thereupon Master Grubb slips his hands down by his sides, and turns his eyes up to the ceiling, as if wondering where the sound could possibly come from.

The supplicatory looks of the music-baited clergyman are on these occasions quite touching and most mutely eloquent: they seem to say

"Pray spare me a little;—suffer me to address my flock. I do not interrupt your music with my preaching, why should you interrupt my preaching with your music? My sermons are not very long, why will not you hear them out? I encroach not on your province, why will you encroach upon mine? Let me, I pray you, finish my days on earth as pastor of this flock, and do not altogether fiddle me out of the church." But the hearts of the "village musicianers" are as hard as the nether millstone; they have no more bowels than a bassoon, no more brains than a kettle drum.

Another grievance is, that these Snatcham choristers have a most intense and villanous provincialism of utterance: it is bad enough in speaking, but in singing they make it ten times worse; for they dilate, expand, and exaggerate their cacophony, till it becomes almost ludicrous to those who are not accustomed to it. The more excited they are, whether it be by joy or anger, the more loudly they sing,

the more broadly they blare out their provincial intonations ; and it is very seldom indeed that they ascend their gallery without some stimulus or other of this nature. If they all be united together in the bonds of amity and good-will ; if Martin Grubb have suspended his jealousy of Gripe, and if Gripe no longer look with envy and hatred upon Grubb ; if some new tune be in preparation wherewith to astonish and enrapture the parishioners ; if there be in the arrangement tenors and trebles enough to satisfy the ambition of Gripe, and bass enough to develop the marvellous powers of Grubb :— there is a glorious outpouring of sound and vociferation, which none but the well-disciplined ears of the Snatcham parishioners can possibly bear. The walls of Snatcham church must be much stronger than those of Jericho, or they would have been roared to rubbish long ere this. But if the agreement of the choir be the parent of noise, their disagreement is productive of much more. More than once the

Gripe and the Grubb factions have carried their animosity so far as to start two different tunes at the same time. And what can be done in such a case? Who is in the wrong? If the Grubb faction were to yield, they would betray a consciousness that they had not acted rightly in their selection of a tune; and if the Gripe faction were to withdraw from the contest, or to chime in with the Grubbs, they would seem to show the white feather: so they battle it out with all their might and main, and each party must sing and play as loud as possible, in order to drown the noise of the other. After church-time the Grubbs throw all the blame upon the Gripes, and the Gripes retort the charge upon the Grubbs, and a man had need have the wisdom of a dozen Solomons to judge between them. So excited with passion, and puffing, and singing, and playing, have the parties sometimes been after a *flare-up* of this kind, that they have looked as tired as two teams of horses just unharnessed from two oppo-

sition stage-coaches;—nay, the very instruments themselves have appeared exhausted, and an active imagination might easily believe that the old big burly bassoon, standing in a lounging attitude in one corner of the gallery, was panting for want of breath. Such explosions as these, however, do not frequently occur, and it is well they do not; when they do, a reconciliation generally takes place soon after, and an apology is made to the good pastor, more, perhaps, from compassion to his infirmities than out of respect to his office or his years; and his mild reply is generally to the following effect—“Ah! well, my good friends, I think another time you will find it more easy to sing all one tune: I marvel much that ye don’t put one another out by this diversity of singing.”

There is also another mode in which the parties manifest their discrepancy of opinion, or discordancy of feeling, and that is by the silence of half the choir. Now one would think that such an event would be a joy and a relief

to the good man, who loves quiet; and so it is physically, but not morally: for though his ears are relieved from one half of the ordinary musical infliction, yet he is mentally conscious that evil thoughts are cherished in the breasts of the silent ones, that they who sing are not praising God in their songs, and that they who sing not, are not praising him by their silence.

But the climax of the abominations of the Snatcham choristers I have yet to record, and I hope that by their follies other choirs, if there be any so absurd, will take warning. It has been already said that this celebrated Snatcham choir made it a great point to obtain leave from their rector for all the abominations and absurdities which they were accustomed to inflict upon the parish under the guise of music; but the arrogant importunity of their solicitation was such that they seemed to bid defiance to refusal, so that their asking leave was after the fashion of the beggar in *Gil Blas*, who held his musket in the direction of the donor's head.

At a large town in the county in which Snatcham is situated there had been a musical festival, the directors of which, in order to give *eclat* to their advertisements, had used all manner of means to swell the number of performers. For this purpose they had sought every hedge and ditch, and highway and by-way in the county, to pick up every individual who had the slightest pretension whatever to musical talent. In such a search, of course the Snatcham choir could not by any possibility be overlooked. They were accordingly retained for the choruses, in consequence of which they underwent much musical drilling; nor were they a little pleased at the honour thus thrust upon them. They of course distinguished themselves, though I must say that the wisest thing chorus singers can do is not to distinguish themselves; but the Snatcham choir, it is said, actually did distinguish themselves, especially in the Hallelujah Chorus, and so fascinated were they with that chorus, and their own distinguished manner

of singing it, that they resolved unanimously to perform it at Snatcham church. This was bad enough; but this was not the worst, for nothing would serve them but they would have it, of all days in the year, on Good Friday!

On the evening of the day before, the whole body of the choristers, vocal and instrumental, went up to the rectory, and demanded an audience of their worthy pastor. The good man trembled at their approach, and his heart sank within him at the announcement that they had something very particular to say to him. He thought of harp, flute, psaltery, dulcimer, sackbut, and all kinds of music, and his ears tingled with apprehension of some new enormity about to be added to the choir, in shape of some heathenish instrument. It was a ludicrous sight, and enough to make the pastor laugh, had he been at all disposed to merriment, to see the whole choir seated in his parlour, and occupying, after a fashion, every chair in the room; for if they were never harmonious in anything

else, they were perfectly harmonious as to their mode of sitting: they were all precisely in the same attitude, and that attitude was—sitting on the very outward edge of the chair, with their hats carefully held between their knees, their mouths wide open, and their eyes fixed upon vacancy. At the entrance of the clergyman they all rose, bowed with simultaneous politeness, and looked towards Martin Grubb as their mouthpiece. Martin Grubb, with his broad heavy hand, smoothed his locks over his forehead, and said—"Hem!"

"Well, Mr. Grubb," replied the rector, "you and your friends, I understand, have something particular to say to me."

"Why yes, Sir," said Mr. Grubb, "we are called upon you by way of deputation like, just to say a word or two about singing; and for the matter of that, we have been practising a prettyish bit of music out of Handel, what they sung at the musical festival, called the Hallelujah Chorus; and as our choir sung it so well

at the festival as to draw all eyes upon us, we have been thinking, Sir, with your leave, if you please, and if you have no objection, that we should just like to sing it at church."

"At church?"

"Yes, Sir, if you please, at church, to-morrow. The Hallelujah Chorus you know, Sir, being part of the Messiah, we thought it would be particular appropriate; and we are all perfect in our parts, and there's two or three chaps out of the next parish that are coming over to Snatcham to see their friends, and they'll help us you know, Sir, and everything is quite ready and rehearsed and all that; and we hope, Sir, you won't have no objection, because we can never do it so proper as with them additional voices what's coming to-morrow, and there will be such lots of people come to church on purpose to hear us, that they will all be so disappointed if we don't sing it."

Here James Gripe, somewhat jealous of his rival's eloquence, and taking advantage of

Martin's pausing for a moment to recover breath, stepped forward, saying — "No, Sir, we hope you won't refuse us your leave, because all the people so calculate upon hearing it, that they will go away in dudgeon if so be as they are disappointed, and mayhap they will never come to church again, but go among the methodishes or some of them outlandish sexes; and it would be a pity to overthrow the established church just for the matter of a stave or two of music."

The rector sighed deeply but not audibly, and replied, saying, in a tone of mild expostulation — "But to-morrow, my friends, is Good Friday, a day of extraordinary solemnity, and scarcely admitting even the most solemn music in its service."

"Exactly so," interrupted Martin Grubb, "that's the very thing I say, Sir, and therefore the Hallelujah Chorus is the most peculiar appropriate: it's one of the most sollumest things I ever heard,—its quite awful and grand

—enough to make the hair of one's head stand upright with sublimity."

"'Tis indeed, Sir," added James Gripe, "you may take my word for it, Sir."

"Perhaps," returned Martin Grubb, "your reverence never heard it; now if so be as you never heard it, mayhap you don't know nothing about it, in which case we can, if you please, with your permission, sing you a little bit of it, just to give you an idea of the thing."

The poor persecuted pastor looked round upon his tormentors in blank amazement, and saw them with their ruthless mouths wide open, and ready to inflict upon him the utmost penalty of their awful voices. In tremulous tones the worthy man exclaimed, "No, no, no, pray don't—pray don't—don't trouble yourselves—I beg you will not. I know the piece of music to which you refer, and I think if you could perform it on any other day than Good Friday——"

Singers are a peculiarly irritable class of

persons, and the slightest opposition or contradiction irritates and disturbs them, so that at the very moment that the rector uttered a sentence at all interfering with their will, they all surrounded him with clamorous and sulky importunity, and set to work with all diligence to demolish his objections.

"Please, Sir," said Martin Grubb, shaking his big head with a look of dogged wilfulness, "I don't see how it's to be done. The Hallelujah Chorus requires a lot of extra voices what isn't to be got every day; and if we tells them chaps as is coming over to-morrow to help us, that we don't want their help, they may take tiff, and never come over to Snatcham again."

"But perhaps," the pastor meekly replied, "they may assist you in the grave and sober singing of some serious and well-known psalms in which all the congregation may unite."

On hearing this, the broad-faced butcher expanded his features into a contemptuous sort of a grin, and said—"Come, now, that is a

good one, as if reg'lar scientific singers would come all the way to Snatcham just to sing old psalm tunes!"

Mr. Gripe also said—"He! he! he!"

"He! he! he!" is a very conclusive kind of argument; and so the rector of Snatcham felt it to be, for he could not answer it, nor refute it, nor evade it. He looked this way and that way, up to the ceiling and down to the floor, towards Mr. Gripe and towards Mr. Grubb; but neither ceiling nor floor, nor Gripe nor Grubb, afforded him any relief from his painful embarrassment. The exulting singers saw that he was posed, and that now was the time to push home their victory, and overwhelm the rector by their united importunities. So they all crowded round him at once, and almost all at once began to assail him with such a torrent of reasons and argumentation that he had not a word to say for himself.

"Please, Sir," said Onesiphorus Bang, "I ha'n't got nothing else ready to play."

"Nor I neither," said Issachar Crack.

"Please, Sir," said Alexander Rodolpho Crabbe, "we never like to do nothing without your leave, and we hope you won't compel us to do so now. My wife says she'll never come to church again, if the Hallelujah Chorus is not performed to-morrow."

"And I declare," said Gregory Plush, "that for my part I never wish to touch the serpent again, if we mayn't do that piece of music."

Absalom and Peter Gripe also said the same as touching the clarionets; and James Gripe then looked at the rector with a quaintly interrogative aspect, which, without uttering a word, without Absalom and Peter's clarionets?" Now, seemed to say—"There, Sir, what will you do for his own part, the worthy pastor would have been glad to get rid of the whole clamour of their music, for these choristers were always at loggerheads either with one another, or with all the rest of the parish.

The rector, thus overwhelmed with argument

and eloquence, with pathos and importunity, found himself compelled to yield, which he did with the worst grace imaginable. Away went the choristers, rejoicing in the triumph of music, and full of glee at the thought of the wonderful figure they should cut on the morrow, when, assisted by the "chaps from the next village," they astonished the natives with the Hallelujah Chorus.

That night neither the singers nor the rector slept: the former were kept awake by the anticipation of musical glory, and the latter was made restless by the dread of musical absurdity. Good Friday came:—the whole village looked more like a scene of festivity than of fasting. The "chaps from the next village," as Martin Grubb called them, were as gay as so many larks: there was such a display of blue coats and yellow buttons as never was seen before. The singing gallery was full to suffocation, and the church itself was crowded. The squire of the parish was present, and his family also were

with him, and the singers were so happy that they could hardly contain themselves. They did not mind the prayers : they had heard them before, and did not think them half so well worth hearing as the Hallelujah Chorus. There was such a rustling of leaves of music books, and such a buzz of whispering voices, that the worthy rector could hardly be heard. The choristers had arranged that the Hallelujah Chorus should be sung immediately before the sermon, and they thought that the prayers would never be over : they were as impatient as a young horse in harness.

At length the prayers were finished, and the merciless choristers let loose upon the congregation to inflict whatever musical torture they pleased. Away they burst with relentless and resistless fury. There was such scraping, and blowing, and roaring, and growling, and screaming, as never was heard ; the powers of every voice, and of every instrument, were exerted to the utmost of their capability ;—there was

such an infinite variety of articulation of Hallowya, Holleluyear, Allyluyer, and Ahmen, and Awmen, and Ameen, that none but the initiated could form a guess what the singers were about. The patient and afflicted rector sat still in the pulpit, waiting till the storm should be over: he knew that it could not last for ever, and that they must soon sing themselves hoarse or out of breath. There is an Irish proverb which says, "Single misfortunes never come alone;" this was verified in the present case; for a misunderstanding occurred, which produced a double infliction of the music. Messrs. Grubb, Gripe, Crabbe, Bang, Crack, and their friends, when performing at the cathedral, had observed that one or two parts of the performance had been encored by a signal from his Grace the Duke of ——, who was present as patron, and this signal consisted of the silent waving or lifting up of a white pocket-handkerchief. Now, unfortunately, just as the band was bringing its mighty performance to

a close, the squire of the parish most innocently drew his handkerchief out of his pocket; but happening to draw it forth with a peculiar grace, or with what Mr. Grubb and his friends thought a peculiar grace, they were most graciously pleased to take it for granted that it must be a signal for a repetition of the chorus, and therefore, just at the moment when the good rector was pleasing himself with the thought that the absurd display was over, they all burst forth again with renewed vigour. He thought that they were absolutely mad; he looked; he sighed; he shook his head; but he was only answered by Halleluyear, Allyluyer: and when they had finished the second time, he was half afraid that they would begin again, and sing it the third time. When the service was over, the good man took the liberty to hint to his musical parishioners that he thought they had performed a work of supererogation in performing the chorus twice. They themselves felt that they had somewhat encroached, but they laid the

blame upon the squire, whose slightest wish, they thought, should be obeyed. The squire was very sorry when he found what mischief he had inadvertently done, and promised that he would take care, in future, not to pull out his handkerchief again in singing time.



**DAME DEBORAH BOREHAM'S
ALMSHOUSES.**

DAME DEBORAH BOREHAM'S
ALMSHOUSES.

THERE was a great deal of giving and bequeathing in the will of Dame Deborah Boreham of Barncastle Abbey, and such an iteration of items, that the lawyer who drew up the document would have been tired to death, had it not been for the consoling thought of his fees. The most troublesome and most frequently altered items were those which had reference to founding and endowing six almshouses for the comfort and support of six pious widows of the village of Barncastle. Dame Deborah Boreham was well stricken in years at the time when she made her will; and she had in the course of her life experienced many

troubles of one kind or other, most of which received their embellishment, if not their existence, from her own natural fidgettiness of constitution. But it had so happened that as the evening of her days came on, the agitations of her life abated. So have I seen an April day, restless from morn to eve, with its flying clouds and passionate showers, and gusty sobbings of an uncertain wind, at last sink quietly down into the lap of night with a calm and placid smile, and with an evening breeze as gentle as the breath of a sleeping child. Such were Dame Deborah Boreham's latter days, and so much did she enjoy them, that she thought she could not make a better use of part of her fortune than in founding almshouses for the use of the aged poor, that they might therein pass their latter days in peace. Most anxious was she that the benevolent intentions of her will should be carried into full effect; for which purpose every clause which had reference to them was examined and weighed,

considered and re-considered, with a most exquisite and wearisome scrupulosity. Seeing how much charity had been abused, and charitable bequests diverted from their proper application, the good old lady did all in her power to prevent such evil from befalling her bequests; and, therefore, she gave her lawyer much trouble, for which she made much apology, always adding: "My wish is to make the poor creatures comfortable." If she used these words once, she used them a hundred times; and, singular enough, they were the last she spoke. And when she died, and the almshouses were built, the words, "My wish is to make the poor creatures comfortable," were graven on the tablet which told the world, that "These six Almshouses were founded and endowed by Dame Deborah Boreham of Barncastle Abbey, A.D. 1692."

When Cicero wrote his treatise *De Senectute*, he had never seen or visited a set of almshouses. Poor old women living in such seclusion were a

modification of humanity unknown to the Romans, who, like all fighting people, did not see much in old age to admire or to be interested about. It is to the benign influences of Christianity that we owe the increased attention and sympathy which are bestowed upon the helpless. Till that religion had civilised the heart, there had been merely a cold respect paid to age; but there was no feeling of sympathy towards it, and it was supposed to have neither form nor comeliness. Another and a better feeling has now found its way to the human heart, and there is thought to be something interesting and beautiful in old age. And so there is for those who have leisure to observe, penetration to discern, and taste to admire it. When Cicero wrote his book on the blessings of age, he wrote it with ingenious sophistry, in order to reconcile himself to the approach of those days in which life should grow unlovely—he desired life, and therefore dreaded the coming of that time when life should be, as he truly imagined

it would be, no longer desirable. He, however, did not think much, in his writing, of poor old women; he thought more of old gentlemen in comfortable circumstances. He did not look so much at the essence of old age as at some of its pleasanter accidents. In a word, it is much to be apprehended that, notwithstanding his eloquent declamation concerning his hope of meeting Cato and other Roman worthies in a higher state of being, he regarded old age and death rather as the end of this life than as the beginning of another. But there is something beautiful in old age! The world and all that is therein is beautiful, and we ought not to consider it so much our misfortune that we do not know *where* to look for beauty, as our fault that we do not know *how* to look for it.—Come, let us go to Dame Deborah Boreham's Almshouses.

The year 1692 is a long while ago, and many changes have taken place on the face of the earth since that time. One of the most remark-

able of the changes that occur in the aspect of old buildings is that they sink into the earth, or that the earth by gradual accumulation rises round them—which amounts to the same thing. These almshouses, which were not very lofty buildings originally, are now so imbedded in the earth that every one whose stature exceeds four feet six inches must stoop on passing into them. They are built of brick and stone, but time has so equalised the appearance of the materials which compose the structure, that they seem to be one uniform mass, and in colour all but black. Each house has two rooms, one below, the other above. This was inconsiderate on the part of Dame Deborah Boreham's architect; for it is wearisome to the limbs of the aged to mount the stairs. I mentioned this, but my objection was over-ruled; for in the village of Barncastle it is reckoned a much genteeler thing to have a "bed-room up stairs than on the ground floor. So the good old women endure the inconvenience for the sake

of the gentility. Bless their hearts, I love them for it; life would be but little were it not for gentility. We are too much in the habit now-a-days of despising and sneering at the pretty formalities of our forefathers. In this we do wrong—for the very adhesiveness of society depends upon formality: without etiquette we should be all brute beasts, and the equalising of humanity would be the bringing of all down to the dust.—There are six of the almshouses, all of them occupied, and if we visit one or more, and neglect any of them, we shall occasion much uneasiness among the neglected; and as it was Dame Deborah Boreham's wish to make the poor creatures comfortable, we have no right to do any thing to make them uncomfortable. Now let us see how comfortable they are.

Number one of Dame Deborah Boreham's almshouses is occupied by a very old—what shall we call her?—not lady, for ladies do not live in almshouses, nor woman, for there is no such being as an old woman,—old women went

out of fashion soon after the abolition of witchcraft:—well then, an old body, for so she is generally termed by her neighbours. This old body, whose name is Martha Crump, has been in the house upwards of twenty years. She was not very young when she came in, and of course is now much more remote from youth than she was then. But you never saw such a picture of neatness, such an image of exactness, in your life. Upon her head she wears a white muslin cap, plaited all round with mathematical precision, from the zenith of her forehead to the nadir of her chin; and within that oval muslin frame appears her face, as a picture of profound placidity, a homily of contentment and peace. The very wrinkles which time has made in her visage are exact and uniform,—nay, they are not wrinkles,—they are rather superannuated dimples, all smiling,—not laughing,—for smiling age is beautiful, and laughing age is irreverent,—they are the trophies, not the triumphs, of time, for there can be no triumph where there

has been no resistance, and Martha Crump was never known to struggle against time, either to urge his flight or to retard it. Tradition says that she was once the prettiest little girl in the village, as lively as a bird, cheerful with unboisterous mirth, and prettily blending, in pungent combination, the purest innocence and the utmost fun. They used to say of her that her heart was too light to break,—but sorrow, alas! found its way therein, and made it heavy enough. A thoughtless and wicked young man, who mistook passionate admiration of a pretty face for the sober sincerity of honest love, gained her unsuspecting heart, became her husband, and deserted her, even before her first and only child was old enough to call her mother. But even then, deeply as she felt her sad and worse than widowed lot, she gave not way to gloomy despondency, nor did she make others wretched by wearying them with the tale of her sorrows. She toiled diligently for the support of herself and child; but by the time her son was able and

willing to labour for himself and his mother too, he died; and when the neighbours expressed their commiseration that her boy had not lived long enough to repay the debt of gratitude which he owed to his mother, she replied, that he had more than repaid a mother's care each hour he had lived. Everybody pitied the bereaved mother, and they wondered much at the tears she shed when she heard that her wicked husband had perished miserably in a foreign land. Everybody also thought she was a very proper object for Dame Deborah Boreham's charity; and after waiting twenty years for a vacancy, she obtained admittance. Now, everybody said that Dame Deborah Boreham's wish would be abundantly gratified in the instance of Martha Crump. They were right enough. Here Martha has lived upwards of twenty years, and here, for aught that appears to contradict it, she may live upwards of twenty years longer. There is a look of durability about her, which seems not so much to defy the effect of time by

a hardness of resistance, as to evade it by a sweet placidity. Her days are so much alike that she can hardly distinguish one from another. Her time never hangs heavily, and never moves too rapidly,—she finds no fault with anything that is,—she has no vain regrets for anything that has been,—she has no fears or apprehensions for anything that may be. The furniture of her apartment, in addition to the usual indispensables of a table and chairs, consists of a Bible, a Prayer-book, a pair of spectacles, and a snuff-box; and with these she amuses herself all day long, save the little intervals that she occupies at her meals. Her tea-pot is always standing by the fireside—it is a little round red thing, about the size and shape of an apple-dumpling, with a spout as long as a baby's finger, and the lid is made fast to the handle with a silver chain. As for her dinners, they are large enough to feed a dozen—sparrows. The neatness of her room, and the cleanliness of herself and all about her, are really surprising. She takes snuff, it is

true, but with such economical cleanliness that not a grain of it falls upon the table, the Bible, the carpet, or the good old body's dress, nor is it visible on her lip, nor has the dye of it stained her finger or thumb. The little fireplace, and the little fender, and the little poker, shovel, and tongs, look as bright and as neat as a set of silver mathematical instruments, and not much larger. The very smoke seems to go carefully up the chimney, curling and twirling and rolling itself up into the smallest possible compass, as if it would take all possible pains not to leave any soot behind. The good old creature too has a watch, which hangs over the fire-place,—I don't know of what use it can be to her; perhaps she likes to hear it tick. When people are alone and cheerful, the ticking of a watch is cheerful,—it is something alive and companion-like; but when people are alone and gloomy, or moody, or brooding, or melancholy, then the ticking of a watch is dismal,—it is something death-like, and the sound of it makes the soli-

tude feel more intense. But Martha is always happy,—I don't think she would be moody and gloomy if she had a screech-owl for her constant companion,—she would cure the owl of the mulligrubs, and make him as lively as a lark. However, we must not give all our attention to Martha, or her neighbours will be jealous.

In number two of Dame Deborah Boreham's almshouses, dwells one whom we should very grievously offend if we denied to her the title of lady,—she will perhaps compromise it for gentlewoman. Indeed, she often says that she is a gentlewoman born, and so she is,—her father was an apothecary, and her husband was an apothecary, and if between the two apothecaries she be not a gentlewoman, I should like to know who is. This gentlewoman's name is Penelope Hipkins. She also has a Bible, a pair of spectacles, and a snuff-box, but she makes most use of the last-named article. None of them look such paragons of neatness as those at the next door. Mrs. Hipkins would not for the world

wear such a close cap as Martha Crump does ; but Martha Crump is not a gentlewoman born, and what might be very suitable to Martha Crump would not at all become Mrs. Hipkins. "People ought to know their station," Mrs. Hipkins says, and I think she is right; and if she does not know hers, I am sure it is not for want of talking about it. I don't at all wonder that Mrs. Hipkins does not wear the same sort of cap as Martha Crump wears, for the face of Mrs. Hipkins is excessively long and very thin. Moreover, Mrs. Hipkins has a cast in the eye—indeed, I believe that one of her eyes has a perfect sinecure, seeing that it receives no light and sheds no tears ; for when Mrs. Hipkins is very pathetic, as she always is when she adverts to the good old days that are gone, she generally sheds tears, in which case all the burden of grief falls upon her right eye, which weeps, alone,—her left eye neither knows nor cares what her right eye does. Mrs. Hipkins is a solitary kind of person, because knowing her

station, and feeling her superiority to the other occupants of Dame Deborah Boreham's almshouses, she cannot associate with them on equal terms. She has had an education, which is another badge of superiority; she spells uncommonly well, and she reads with a very capital emphasis, which now and then she is pleased to call *hemphasis*, by way of marking her high sense of its importance. She also knows something of Latin, which she gleaned from the prescriptions that used to be sent to her husband's shop. Moreover, she knows something of geography, for in her father's study there used to be a pair of globes. Indeed, the other tenants of the almshouses are decidedly of opinion that Mrs. Hipkins is far too high company for them to associate with,—they might, indeed, drink her tea and take her snuff, and warm their old fingers at her fireside, but they could never understand her fine long words, nor rightly apprehend the beauty of her *hemphasis*. Indeed, between you and me, gentle

reader, I don't believe that any one of the inhabitants of Dame Deborah Boreham's almshouses, excepting, of course, Mrs. Hipkins herself, knows the meaning of the word *hemphasis*; if they attempt to pronounce it, they are sure to be seized with a fit of coughing. I have read and heard a great deal concerning the peculiar pains and sorrows of elevated station, and I think that Mrs. Hipkins experiences some of these pains. She is a person of great sensibility. Perfectly aware of her rank in society, she speaks of it with tears to every one with whom she converses. She never thought of being reduced to live in an almshouse,—she was once as good a lady as any within ten miles of Barncastle. True indeed it is that during her husband's lifetime she experienced many troubles, as, for instance, when the people of the village and the neighbourhood, having a decided partiality for mutton, in preference to medicine, left poor Mr. and Mrs. Hipkins little else for dinner than their own jalap and pills

and squills and rhubarb; but still, though the pantry was thin, and the kitchen fire had little else to do than to keep itself warm, Mrs. Hipkins was a lady. Mrs. Hipkins is a lady still; she despises everything low and vulgar, and speaks very contemptuously of Martha Crump's little, round, red, tea-pot standing all day long by the fire-side. Mrs. Hipkins cannot possibly exist without the help of something in the shape of a servant,—so she spares a little out of her slender finances to pay a great, large, clumsy, fat, flat-sided, two-fisted girl from the village, named Phoebe Lobb, to come as an occasional help, to light her fire, and pump water for her tea. Mrs. Hipkins speaks with a sigh of those days when her dear departed husband kept a man-servant, as she is pleased by courtesy to style a lubberly boy, who washed phials and gallipots, [carried out medicines, cleaned knives and shoes, and filched the fat from the dripping-pan whenever they had roast meat on Sundays. Mrs. Hipkins thinks that the world is going very wrong, regards

the nobility and gentry as very proud and exclusive kind of folk, because they seem to forget that she was once an apothecary's wife, and now take no more notice of her than of the common people in the other almshouses. She has been contriving a long time to convert her bed-room into a drawing-room, only the worst of it is that she shall then have nowhere to put her bed. She blames Dame Deborah Boreham for not having made a more liberal provision for the tenants of the almshouses, especially such as have seen better days. If she could but have a drawing-room, she would be perfectly happy. So she says,—but the fact is, that she is much more happy in grumbling about what she has not, than she possibly could be in possessing what she fancies she desires.

Now we come to number three,—and here we have the most wonderful being that this earth contains:—a perfect, a faultless woman! And yet she has a head, and a tongue in it too, as you may hear any day you may choose to

call at her house. This is no less a personage than Margery Dabble, widow of the late parish clerk of Barncastle. She obtained an almshouse before she had been a widow six months; for she worried the trustees with such an incessant and unmerciful inundation of talk, that they were glad to promise her the first vacancy. She thought indeed that she had the best right of any widow in the parish, and that, if a vacancy did not soon take place, one ought to be made for her. She almost imagined that Dame Deborah Boreham had founded the almshouses with an especial and prophetic destination for her own particular self. She had every possible claim: she was of the village of Barncastle,—she was a poor widow,—and she was unquestionably pious, as being the widow of the parish clerk, who had said “Amen” for forty years and upwards. As soon as Mrs. Margery Dabble had taken possession of her new residence, with all its appurtenances, privileges and endowments, she began to find ten thousand faults with everything,—for nothing

was done as she would have done it, had she had the ordering of all things. The almshouses were not properly built, nor properly furnished, nor properly endowed, nor properly managed, for the trustees very carelessly admitted very improper persons. Sometimes they put in those that were too young, sometimes they admitted those that were too old, sometimes the occupants were too genteel, and sometimes they were too vulgar, and sometimes their piety was not quite so entirely unequivocal as that of the widow of the parish clerk who had said "Amen" for forty years and upwards. But not only does Mrs. Margery Dabble find fault with, and interest herself about, everything that concerns the almshouses,—she extends the liberality of her anxiety to all manner of matters, public and private—births, marriages, deaths, courtships, legacies, quarrellings, scandal, calumny, gossip, and news of the village, together with a general attention to politics. Nothing comes amiss to her in the way of talk,—her eyes and her mouth are always

open, and she gapes for gossip as an unfledged sparrow gapes for its daily worms. There is not one of the almshouses which has so many visitors as that in which Mrs. Dabble dwells. The people of Barncastle don't like gossiping, only they think that poor Mrs. Dabble likes to know what is going on in the world. Mrs. Dabble would make an excellent editor of a weekly newspaper. She exaggerates everything into a matter of wonderment. When she is telling you anything, she lifts up her hands in astonishment, and opens her eyes so wide that you would fear they might drop out of her head. She talks also with marvellous rapidity, for the words come tumbling out one after another, helter-skelter, as though they would break each other's necks, and some of them are very long words too. Only, as Mrs. Penelope Hipkins says, she uses no *hemphasis*; indeed, she can't spare time for it,—her words hop out too quickly to have the salt of *hemphasis* laid upon their tails. Oh, if Mrs. Dabble ever hears of any wicked doings

in this wicked world of ours—and wicked doings there will be, so long as the wicked world endures—with what torrents of eloquent vituperation will she deluge the name and reputation of the transgressor, expressing herself so utterly astonished and overwhelmed with amazement, at the most unprecedented abomination! The fact is, she so completely forgets her own wonderings, that she has a fresh stock of the marvellous every day. She lives upon monstrosities, and she never heard the like of everything she hears. There is not a man, woman, or child in the whole village of Barncastle, of whose history she does not know something—perhaps everything—aye, perhaps even more than they know themselves. Every body tells Mrs. Dabble everything in confidence, and Mrs. Dabble reciprocates by telling everybody in confidence everything she knows, and more too. Mrs. Dabble is a woman of such extraordinary mental powers, that she is hardly aware of the stupendousness of her own intellectual resources.

She hardly knows, for instance, where memory ends and imagination begins. Her memory has the same effect upon a fact that the water of a ditch has upon the body of a dead cat, swelling it most prodigiously. She quite the reverse of forgets a story, especially if it is a calumnious one. But she hates scandal and calumny, and all that sort of thing, and never mentions or dwells upon the sins of her neighbours from any other motive than a pure principle of virtuous indignation. She thinks it a sin not to reprove sin, so that her mind is in a state of continual effervescence of virtuous indignation. She has no patience with the wickedness of the world; so she scolds it in good set terms every day,—when she can get any one to listen to her. She is in a towering passion because everybody won't do as they ought to do; though, if they were, she would be very likely to go hang herself for want of something to talk about. She of course must be perfect herself, or she could

not be so eloquent concerning the imperfections of others.

Who has not travelled out of London into the country?—and who has not observed and enjoyed that deep sensation of quiet and repose which takes possession of the frame, when, emerging from the rumbling of the stones and the noise of the streets, the carriage first rolls smoothly along on the well-beaten road? Even so did we feel when, quitting the eloquent presence of the glib Mrs. Dabble, we found our way into the peaceful abode of the meek and quiet Susan Prime. She is a widow indeed,—she looks as if she had been born a widow. Her husband had been dead four-and-twenty years, yet, to look at her widow's cap, and the face which fits it so well, you can hardly suppose that the coffin has been nailed down two hours. Mrs. Susan Prime is a small woman, and so very humble withal that she seems to shrink into herself, and to become as nothing in a stranger's presence. She thinks Mrs. Dabble a wonder-

fully wise woman, and Mrs. Hipkins mightily genteel; but she envies neither the wisdom of the one nor the gentility of the other. She thinks so very lowly of herself that she is almost miserable because she is so happy. Her feeling is, that she has more than she deserves; and she imagines that, peradventure, she is keeping out others who have a better claim than herself. If, when Mrs. Dabble was fussing and fidgeting and prating and canvassing for an almshouse, it had been proposed to Mrs. Prime to walk out in order to make room for the widow of the parish clerk, she would have retired with all becoming modesty, and even with gratitude, thankful that she had been permitted to enjoy the retreat so long, though she had been there but six years. She would willingly have acknowledged the claim of superior piety in her whose husband had been parish clerk, and had said "Amen" for forty years and upwards. Mrs. Susan Prime is the widow of an honest man, a carpenter by trade, who passed through

life very respectably, and so quietly, that he was no sooner dead, than he was forgotten by every body except his widow, who persists in immortalising his memory by her widow's caps. His successor in the business put up a wooden monument to his memory in the churchyard, but the paint was laid on so thin that the first shower washed it all off. His widow's mourning is now his only monument. Either Mrs. Dabble had spoken so loud as to make us deaf, or Mrs. Prime cannot speak loud enough to be heard. Her voice is as gentle as a midnight breeze, that seems to fear lest it should wake the sleeping birds. She is not afraid to look in your face when she speaks, but when her eye catches yours, she feels abashed, hangs down her head, and looks upon the ground. To talk with her, you would think that some special grief weighed heavily upon her heart, or that some deep remorse preyed upon her spirit. But she never had any grief save the loss of her husband,—she never had any children to lose,—and so tremulously anxious is she to do right, that she

is always afraid she is doing wrong. She would not for the world find fault with anything or anybody—she would think it a sin; and she is so consistent in her anti-censorious principle, that she does not even censure the censoriousness of Mrs. Dabble. She believes, with Mrs. Dabble, that the world is very wicked, but does not imagine herself to be the best person in it,—her humility almost leads her to an opposite conclusion. If it had not been for some kind friends, who thought better of her than she thought of herself, poor Mrs. Susan Prime would never have found herself into the almshouses of Dame Deborah Boreham.

Number five is next door to number four; but the occupant of number five differs from the occupant of number four much more widely than any such small numbers as four and five can express. Some years ago there was a public-house in Barncastle known by the name of the Green Man, and kept by the widow Higgins. But though the widow Higgins kept

the Green Man, the Green Man would not keep the widow Higgins ; and as there happened to be a vacancy in Dame Deborah Boreham's almshouses at the time the Green Man was on his last legs, and about to give up the ghost—not that the widow Higgins is a ghost, far from it—the trustees very kindly nominated the widow to the vacant dwelling and its privileges ;—and there she has been for the last fifteen years. She was tolerably corpulent when she led an active and anxious life ; but since her activity has been exchanged for repose, and her anxiety superseded by competence, her dimensions have pretty considerably increased. The widow Higgins, as she is emphatically called, in consequence of having borne that designation when she kept the public-house, takes things as easily as most people. She enjoys the repose of her easy chair, and is the only one of the six who thinks it too much trouble to go up stairs to bed. There is nothing at all about the widow Higgins savouring of gentility : she

hates gentility with all her heart, and it would really do you good to hear the broad horse-laugh with which she ridicules the grave and solemn assumptions of Mrs. Penelope Hipkins. Widow Higgins having enjoyed a state of rude health for many years, has had no occasion for the administrations of apothecaries; therefore she speaks and thinks of them with a wonderful deal of contempt. It is her serious opinion that if the people of Barncastle had drunk more copiously of the home-brewed ale at the Green Man, there would have been no occasion for any such animal in the village as an apothecary. Like the rest of the tenants of the almshouses, she has a bible and a pair of spectacles on the table; but they are of little use, for she can't read. She has no snuff-box, for she prefers tobacco, which she smokes abundantly in a little, short, black stump of a pipe, which she pops under her apron if any of the trustees of the almshouses happen to look in upon her. Her spectacles are useful in hot weather to light

her pipe withal. She has a tremendously broad face, which, when she smokes, looks very much like the full moon in a fog. She is always in very good humour, and sometimes in a humour rather more broad than becomes the character which belongs to her as an inmate of one of Dame Deborah Boreham's almshouses, namely : that of a poor pious widow. Far be it from me to say a word derogatory from her piety, of which she has given such manifest symptoms by conquering a bad habit that had too much the mastery of her while she kept the Green Man ; for when she was landlady of that house she used sometimes to—to—to—absolutely to—swear : but at the particular request of the trustees of Dame Deborah Boreham's almshouses she has totally left it off, though I must say that she sometimes looks as if she thought what she would not say. The widow Higgins is what is called a funny old woman ; she makes a joke of everything. She quizzes her neighbours most unmercifully, especially Mrs.

Hipkins, whom she calls "My lady apothecary." There is certainly a want of dignity about a funny old woman. Mrs. Higgins knows that, and enjoys the fun so much the more because it is destructive of dignity. Some people wonder how it is that she can manage to keep such a constant supply of good spirits; but so it is, that her heart is as light as her body is heavy. She not unfrequently amuses herself with the foible of Mrs. Margery Dabble, by telling that outrageous and intemperate gossip the most improbable tales in perfect confidence, and with a strict injunction that the matter is never to be mentioned on any account whatever; and then, as sure as a gun, the story is known all over the village in less than four-and-twenty hours. Mrs. Dabble does not at all like Mrs. Higgins, but is rather afraid of her; she questions the wisdom of the trustees in placing a woman so fat and funny in an almshouse destined for the use of the pious. Mrs. Dabble has a great deal of spiritual pride, as

being the widow of a man who has said "Amen" at church for forty years and upwards; whereas it is very likely that Mr. Higgins never said "Amen" in his life after he was married.

Lastly, finally, and to conclude, let us take a peep into number six of Dame Deborah Boreham's almshouses; and there we shall see a bit of superannuated sentimentality, that is just not quite ludicrous because it is so very pitiable. Mrs. Clarissa Cobb is the widow of a hair-dresser, if we may dignify with the title of hair-dresser the man whose business it was to shave clodhoppers on Saturday, and frizzle the wig of the parish clerk for Sunday. When Mrs. Clarissa Cobb was Miss Clarissa Hobbs, she fell in love with Mr. Cobb, not knowing him to be a hair-dresser; and when she found out that he was a hair-dresser, and nothing more, but rather something less, she was gone too far to retreat. She became Mrs. Cobb, and she woke from a dream of romance to the reality of a barber's shop. But "what is bred

in the bone will never be out of the flesh :” Clarissa still cultivated sensibility and sentimentality, though surrounded by wig-blocks, soap-suds, and ten-penny razors. The death of Mr. Cobb was a severe blow to Mrs. Cobb, for he did not leave her money enough to buy a new husband; and he left her at that time of life at which husbands are not to be had for nothing. Mrs. Cobb had something of a literary turn; and by way of raising the wind after her husband’s decease, she set about composing a monody to the memory of the dear departed, with a view to publishing it by subscription; but some of her friends persuaded her that it would answer her purpose much better if she would draw up a memorial, stating her case, and soliciting admission into Dame Deborah Boreham’s almshouses. She attended to the suggestion; and in order that what was already composed of the monody might not be altogether thrown away, she melted down the sublimity of the poetry into the plainness of prose, making

of it a portion of her memorial. But even when melted down into plain prose, it was tremendously sublime and pathetic; so that when the trustees of the almshouses read it, they were so exceedingly diverted with its ludicrous pathos that they could not possibly reject the prayer of the petition. And here is Mrs. Clarissa Cobb, in number six, as lackadaisical and sentimental as a milliner's apprentice who lives upon weak tea, thick bread and butter, and superannuated romances. She has upon her table a bible, a pair of spectacles, and a snuff-box, after the fashion of her neighbours: but the snuff bothers her: for, in consequence of her sentimentality, she has frequent use for her handkerchief up to her eyes, and then the snuff gets into her eyes and makes the matter worse still. By the way, it may be here remarked, that nothing so much interferes with the pleasure of crying for nothing, as being under the necessity of crying for something. Mrs. Cobb was at one time desirous of keeping

a pet lamb; but the trustees not wishing that the old ladies should kill their own mutton, recommended her to keep a cat instead. This good lady has, in addition to her other treasures, a choice collection of pathetic stories and sentimental ballads, by means of which she keeps alive the recollection of her early days. Nothing pleases her so much as talking about Mr. Cobb and her courtship. She is not very pretty now, and I don't think she ever was remarkable for her beauty. She is large and rather clumsily formed; her face is neither oval nor round, but a kind of uncouth potato-like shape, and something like a potato in colour; her eyes are dull, her nose flat and her mouth wide; upon her chin are divers bristles; and when she sports the pathetics, you had need have a wonderful command of countenance to avoid laughing outright. She sighs like the abortive puffing of an asthmatic pair of bellows. It is full fifty years ago that she fell in love with Mr. Cobb; and when I called to see her, she

wanted to tell me the whole history of her courtship. But my nerves will not bear anything very pathetic, so I shuffled off as well as I could; and I am told that I may think myself very fortunate in having escaped it, for almost all who call and see her are destined to undergo the story of her early love. She is of course a great reader and admirer of poetry. One of the first questions she asked me was, what I thought of Walter Scott, as a poet; and when I spoke highly of the Lay of the Last Minstrel, she forthwith wept with very rapture, and quoted the memorable lines about

Love rules the camp, the court, the grove,
And men below, and saints above;
For love is heaven, and heaven is love.

And she spouted them forth with *hemphasis* enough to please the fastidious ear of Mrs. Penelope Hipkins.

Dame Deborah Boreham, farewell! blessings on thy memory for having founded and endowed the Barncastle almshouses. Thy wish was to

make the poor creatures comfortable, and thy wish is granted, for thy tenants are all comfortable in various ways; they enjoy their contentment, or their discontent, their smiles or their tears, their gentility or their vulgarity, as the case may be.

THE END.

